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"Mais j'y suis, et, mes bons camarades, par tous les dieux, j'y reste!"

CHARLES K. JOHNSTON.

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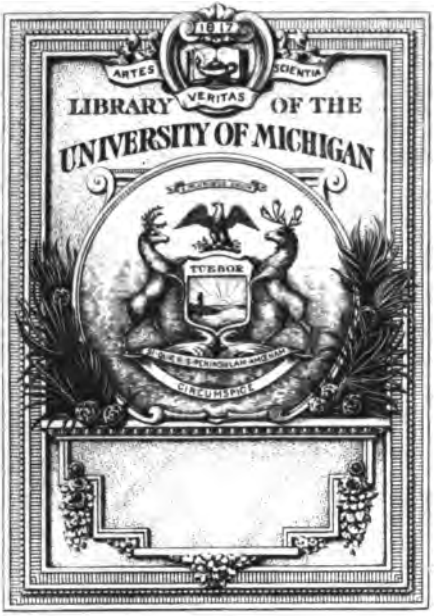
J. Johnston



Bequest of
C. K. Johnston

THE WILDCAT

THE WILD CAT

BY

HUGH WILEY

NEW YORK
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TO

CHARLES ARTHUR PAUSON

"Boy, how come?"

"You knows how come."

THE WILDCAT

BEQUEST OF
C. K. JOHNSTON
FEB 8 1937

CHAPTER I

I

"I don't bother work, work don't bother me,
I'se fo' times as happy as a buh-humble beee-e.
I eats when I kin git it, sleeps mos' all de time
I don't give a doggone if de sun don't neveh shine——"

Vitus Marsden proclaimed to the world the content that filled his heart. Work was good enough for field hands and river niggers. Cutting the lawns that fronted white folks' residences on Legal Hill or taking an occasional r'ar at the gallopin' dominoes when the sevens and 'levens were feelin' anxious to oblige a boy were the sources of an income sufficient for the day. And no man has seen to-morrow.

Vitus walked along a shaded back street. The sidewalk was made of soft red brick that wore down unevenly so that young grass-cut-

ters would flap along and flap along until an old brick would try to bump hisself in an' live with a boy's toes.

In the left pocket of his adhesive shirt three silver dollars lay heavy as a crocodile's conscience. "Black shoes is three dollars, yaller shoes is three-fifty," thought Vitus. "Ketch me one mo' lawn then watch out yaller shoes. I'se a wile-cat f'r yaller an' I'se on my prowl."

The Wildcat was captured at the corner of Fourth and Elm by Mis' Minnie Morrison. "Name's Mis' Minny but folks minds like she was a ol' whale an' them Jonah."

"Vitus, come here."

The Wildcat responded with the muscular activity of his namesake. "Mis' Minny, here I is."

"This lawn needs trimming. It must be trimmed evenly and with precision,—eliminating as far as your inferior technique will permit, the incongruous undulations consequent to a preponderance of clover."

"Yas'm! Is you got a whet-stone?" The Wildcat's intellect sagged for an instant with the effort of remembering some of the heavy-

set words for future use at the Argumentative Pleasure Club.

Ordinarily the business of trimming a lawn meant no more to the Wildcat than shuffling half a mile through a grass-strewn bit of life but Mis' Minnie's specifications had made this a different proposition. Her vocabulary had made work out of a little old job of cutting grass. "I don't bother work, work don't con-flooperate no bumble beee-e,—I'll lend me a lawn-mowin' machine f'r this here ol' elephant of a lawn."

For half an hour after the lawn mower had been borrowed on the strength of a promise to sharpen it up free "to show how good kin I make ol' grass-eater cut" the Wildcat marched with his feet flopping into a cascade of blue-grass and clover which gushed from the whirling knives. He roughed down the incongruous undulations and trimmed the edges as best he could with the lawn mower and was so relieved at the improvement he had wrought that he resolved to sacrifice the edge of his shavin' razor in an attack on the floppity bunches of grass along the margin of the lawn. He produced the razor with a movement similar to

that which a fat man employs in scratching his back and in a few minutes the margin of the lawn was enjoying the bristly status of its interior. The Wildcat raked up the results of the grass-eater's activity and returned the machine to its owner with a request that he try it and see how good kin she cut now. He sat down to rest himself until Mis' Minnie might bestow the fifty cents.

"Black shoes, three dollars. Yaller shoes, three-fifty. Fifty cents where at is you?" He regarded the flappy sole of his left shoe and discovered that the contents of the shoe consisted of about equal parts of foot and clover. He removed the shoe and shook the grass out of it.

Mis' Minnie appeared with the fifty cents.

"From a casual inspection it would appear that your reputation has been substantiated in this instance by equivalent performance."

The Wildcat batted his eyes. "Yas'm, Mis' Minny. Thank you!"

The fifty-cent piece clinked to its place in the pocket of the adhesive shirt beside the three silver dollars. Mis' Minnie walked into the house and Vitus sat down to put on his left

shoe from which the clover had been emptied. "Yaller shoes, three-fifty." The three-fifty clinked nobly as he bent over to put on his shoe.

Pressed against the sole inside of the Wildcat's left shoe, outlining in placid green the perfection of its promise, lay a four-leaved clover.

"Cloveh! Li'l cloveh, us needs action!"

The three-fifty clinked in cadence with the Wildcat's gallop toward a place where the sevens and 'levens were feeling anxious to oblige.

II

In the back room of Willie Webster's barber shop the Wildcat knelt in a circle of his kind, getting action on the three-fifty. A pair of mercury dice introduced by a lodge brother, failed to respond. The Wildcat shot a dollar and let it lay for three passes. He picked up the accumulated wealth and warmed the dice with the breath of victory.

"I'se a fo' leaf wile-cat an' I'se on my prowl! Shoots five dollahs!"

The lodge brother recalled the words of the

guarantee which accompanied the mercury dice. "Boy," he said, "roll 'em!"

The Wildcat rolled 'em and his proprietary interest in the five dollars died a natural death. The lodge brother galloped the dominoes for two passes and whittled the Wildcat down to the measly fifty-cent piece which Mis' Minnie had given him for manicuring the ol' elephant.

The Wildcat massaged the dice between his magenta palms. "Little gallopers, speak to me! Shoots fifty cents!"

The little gallopers spoke to him. Their speech was not that which charms the ears of fortune's paramour. It sounded like the language of a steamboat man or a deppity sheriff. The lodge brother grunted: "Wildcat, you is had your prowl."

The Wildcat retreated from the circle and made his way to the front room of the barber shop. "Willie, how's chances for gettin' me a hair-cut on credit till I cuts me another lawn?"

The proprietor, wise to the financial condition of the victims who emerged from the back room of the shop, lost no time in stating his terms. "I sells haircuts f'r cash,—wartimes

an' folks movin' away has me about bust now. They ain't no more credit 'til after the war is over."

The Wildcat shuffled out of the shop and prowled homeward. He paused in front of a grocery store long enough to figger he might eat a can of sardine fishes. He discovered what "Cash Grocery" meant and he resumed his course.

III

At the boarding-house a white man waited for the Wildcat. The man carried a sheaf of folded up papers in his left hand. The Wildcat recalled the fact that white men with folded up paper never meant any luck for a boy. "Ain't no 'stallment man—I finished up that 'stallment banjo an' that ol' 'stallment gol' watch,—how come dis white man heah?"

The white man challenged: "Boy, your name Vitus Marsden?"

The Wildcat saw no avenue of escape. "Yessuh."

The white man pointed the folded up papers at him. "You are drafted for the First Service Battalion. Report to the provost marshal in

Memphis by to-morrow noon. You're Nine Hundred and Fifty-three Thousand, Four Hundred and Ninety-Seven."

"I sho is considerable—whut's dis heah Fust Service Battalion?" The Wildcat mentally recorded his number.

"Service Battalions are front line construction troops. Your uniform and equipment will be issued as soon as you pass the medical examination."

"Front line—'quipment—'zamination." The Wildcat took hold of his Adam's apple, figgerin' it might keep jumpin' round until it got lost. "You mean Ah's a wah soldier f'r workin' in dis yere wah?"

"Wouldn't say you'll be in the war, boy,"—the white man had his joy in his work,—"you'll be sort of on the edge of it,—the front edge, buildin' railroads f'r haulin' dead Germans away from in front of our cannons."

The Wildcat lost his health and strength during the next three seconds. "Misteh, mah bone misery done got me bad agin'——"

"Before noon to-morrow at Memphis,—the Provost Marshal's office. And if you ain't there you get a military burial to-morrow at

sundown." The white man offered this casual interruption to the Wildcat's complaint and departed in search of the next winner in the lottery.

The military Wildcat curled up on his bed and removed his shoes so as to be foot-loose in his misery. Inside the left shoe, distinct against the dark leather background of the sole, lay the four-leaved clover.

"Cloveh, you fo'-leaf liah, wuz you a hawg I'd barbecue you wid a rock." The Wildcat scraped the four-leaved clover from the inside of his shoe. He clenched the talisman in a savage fist and heaved it from him. It fell on the foot of the bed and attached itself to the surface of a blanket. The Wildcat flopped himself down and tried to groan himself to death. He groaned himself to sleep instead. He was pretty handy when there were any jobs of eating or sleeping to be done. Presently he dreamed of yaller shoes and cascades of four-leaved clover. "I'se a mil'tary Wile-cat and I'se on my prowl! Wah Germans is like gallopin' dominoes—only us boys hauls dead ones on railroads! Shoots five dollahs—Ah needs action!" The Wildcat's lower jaw sagged

down something less than a foot. Without half trying he slept until an hour past noon of the next day.

IV

The Wildcat awakened to confront a threatening past and a tolerably measly future. The window of the room was clouded with a drizzle of rain. The smell of something frying in hot grease suggested that a little grub might come in handy for a hungry prowler. "Ain't et me nothing a-tall since Mis' Minny consecrated me to cuttin' that ol' elephant of a lawn."

Dressing consisted of the simple business of putting on his shoes and hat. The floppity front of the left shoe was lashed to contact with the sole of the Wildcat's foot by means of a piece of string. "Yaller shoes, three-fifty,—I don't need you nohow in the summertime."

Downstairs the empress of the boarding house was rendering grease from some bacon rinds which a white lady had bestowed upon her. The Wildcat looked things over and suggested that a little breakfast might build up his run-down constitution.

The Amazon eyed him with the caressing

look of an active rattlesnake. "Brekfus'—you beggin' brekfus' an' dinner cleared up an hour ago. You'se rollin' heavy if you gits any suppeh, you triflin' fiddle-footed mushrat! Clear outen heah!"

The Wildcat lost interest in breakfast. The white man had said something about a military burial in case the rendezvous at the Provost Marshal's office in Memphis was delayed beyond noon. "Mis' Lou, whut time does the clock say now?"

"Inch pas' two o'clock."

953,497 selected from the several evils which confronted him that one which led away from the military burial. Eliminating the Memphis quadrant from the circle of fate there remained the railroad track which led South, the impossible Mississip' to the West, and the Swamp Road leading East. The Swamp Road was pretty fair except that a boy traveling that way had to pass the Hangin' Tree where a piece of the chokin' rope still dangled from a lower limb.

The Wildcat rolled up a blanket from the bed where he had slept and tossed it gently out of the window. In making his exit he

was careful to avoid Mis' Lou. He sneaked down the back street with his blanket and headed for the railroad track which led South. . . . Farewell, muddy horseshoe bend in the rollin' Mississip'; farewell Hangin' Tree on the Swamp Road; farewell Military Burial.

953,497 reached the railroad yards and headed down the track. The Wildcat was on his prowlin' way.

"I don't bother work, work don't bother me——"

CHAPTER II

I

At the lower end of the railroad yard a soldier stepped from between a pair of boxcars and pointed a shiny new bayonet at the Wildcat's digestive system. Behind the bayonet was the biggest rifle the Wildcat had ever seen.

The soldier strayed a little from the words of the manual. "Nigger," he demanded, "where in hell is you headed for?"

After a while the Wildcat regained partial control of his lower jaw. "Provo' man's place in Memphis f'r 'quipment," he stated.

"Corp'l th' guard—post number six!" the sentry bawled. The Wildcat rolled his eyes. The corporal appeared convoying an automatic pistol whose sagging volume was eloquent of military burials.

"White man with a papeh tol' me my number an' could I git to Memphis in time for dinneh. I got headed round somehow——"

"Boy, head round again an' head quick."

The Wildcat executed an efficient but technically imperfect "About Face." Ten minutes later in a box car filled with twenty more high numbers he was en route for Memphis. In an hour the car was disgorging its brunet accumulation under the smoky trainshed in the Memphis station. A group of officers confronted the Wildcat and his associates. One of these gentlemen with a long paper in his hand was reading numbers.

"953,497."

"Gin'ral, heah I is." The Wildcat stepped forward to whatever kind of military funeral might await him.

The officer consulted his list. "Son, is your name Vitus Marsden?"

"Gin'ral, yessuh."

"Line up over there with those other boys,—and don't call me 'gin'ral.' "

"Gin'ral, yessuh!" Anything to oblige was the present policy. The "Gin'ral" had a low voice like a good poker player. The Wildcat decided that the "Gin'ral" was white folks.

That night the Wildcat slept in a long cotton shed. At quarter to ten a lusty bugler blew the call to quarters. "Whut dat horn mean?"

the Wildcat demanded of an experienced soldier in soldier clothes.

"Sign they's buryin' some noisy nigger," the experienced soldier informed him.

Taps blared with a suddenness to be expected of Gabriel only. "Buryin' us boys as fast as they ketch us," the Wildcat decided. He rolled his blanket around his head and resigned himself to whatever hand the fates might deal from their stacked deck.

Something tickled his ear. "Cotton creeper mos' likely." He reached for the offending insect and inspected it. It was the four-leaved clover, considerably the worse for wear, which he had cast from him the night before in the boarding house. "Cloveh, you hell-raisin' houn'—I'se gonna eat you!" He ground the four-leaved Nemesis to a pulp.

The sergeant in charge of quarters turned out the lights. The Wildcat kept thinkin' and ponderin' about military burials and hauling dead Germans in front of cannons. In his misery he decided to let the Gin'ral help him worry. There was one man what acted like white folks. He fell asleep with the "Gin'ral" between him and the military funeral and the dead Germans

and the Hangin' Tree and the rest of the pesterin' things that wildcats hate.

So far the Wildcat had missed four meals.

II

Reveille sounded. The Wildcat blinked himself into the cold realities of life and sat up. "Boy," he said to the ginger-faced youth next to him, "boy, what us needs is some side meat an' gravy an' biscuits an' . . . when does us eat?"

He put on his shoes and sought out a soldier with three chevrons on his sleeve. "Podnah, where at is us boys' brekfus' 'quipment?"

The sergeant, old in the service, gave the Wildcat his second lesson in military etiquette. The Wildcat figgered that if there was any card lower than a deuce in the military deck, he was it. For the balance of the day he waited for some other boy to start something. In the afternoon he passed the medical examination and stood in line for an hour until his uniform and equipment were issued to him. He was assigned to Company C of the Battalion. At four o'clock the company formed for the first

time. The Wildcat sized down to Squad 7 and took his place in the front rank.

"Company . . . 'tenshun!" The sergeant observed a sudden epidemic of protruding stomachs. "Co'pals will be selected at Retreat for their mil'tary bearin'. When I tells you 'At ease' you eases,—when I tells you 'at rest' you talks. 'At Rest!'"

The boy behind the Wildcat talked. He talked at the Wildcat. "If Cap'n finds that meat plow you's totin' you'll be at res'—after the funeral."

The weight of the Wildcat's shaving razor suddenly rested heavy between the shoulder-blades of his conscience. "Boy, how come?"

"You know how come,—an' it stickin' out agin' yo' coat like ol' hawg's backbone."

The Wildcat straightened up. At Retreat he had shifted his social razor, but he was still acutely straight. The Captain's "Ten'shun" nearly threw him over backward.

Because of his military bearing the Wildcat became corporal of his squad.

One minute after Taps the Wildcat gave his first command. "Lootenant says shut up when

de Taps horn blows. She done blow. Shut up!"

Out of the darkness came an impudent inquiry: "An' who is you?"

"I'se yo' Co'pal."

From another corner of the tent there came a whisper of derision. "Huh—when de Lootenant's gone dey ain't no co'pals!"

The Wildcat fumbled around for an instant and then walked softly toward the source of the whisper. He lighted a match with his left hand. In his right there waved a razor with the meanest blade Squad 7 had ever seen. The match burned out. Until reveille, Squad 7 snored heavily.

III

As near as the Wildcat could figger the war consisted of free rations, free clothes, a little prancin' round and considerable work with picks and shovels. Trench practice was the order of the day, and for three weeks the Company dug trenches. A jack-rabbit, springing from section F-63 of the advance sector, running through the Skagg's pasture, led four members of the Wildcat's family a chase that

terminated in the guardhouse, but with this exception the squad had an excellent record. The Colonel was pleased to remark the fact within hearing of the Wildcat. With cyclones selling at two cents a ton the Wildcat figured Squad 7 was about twelve dollars' worth.

Following three weeks of Rumor, came Orders.

Box cars to an Atlantic port, a few hours in the long pier against which the transport lay, and then four decks below the surface of the harbor the Wildcat realized that as a boiled egg he was something under ninety seconds. All the steamboats he was ever on were made of wood and a nigger could look over the side and see land once in a while, but this old elephant of an iron boat was a jail with four or five cellars.

"Whut grieves my gizzard mos' is why is ol' boat so res'less an' uncertain whah at is she gwine," the Wildcat objected. "Rockin' round all de time like a bog-down mule."

The third day out a strange bugle call floated down from the deck above. "Co'pal, whut dat horn mean?" a startled member of Squad 7 demanded. The Wildcat was pretty well scared

himself, but he managed to pick his cue from a yell in the far corner of the compartment where the sergeants bunked.

"Pay day, boy—ain't you been a soldier long enough to rekonize money when she sings at you?"

An hour later pay day had gravitated to a group of hardboiled professionals whose skill as crap shooters was advertised by their several accumulations of paper money. The Wildcat, still in the game and going stronger every second, was rolling some harvest ivory. Restricted in the calisthenics of chance by the fact that his guardian knees covered two bales of greenbacks, about all he could do was to sweat and win money. Coming out, his opening palm spelled seven or eleven with monotonous regularity. "Shoots fifty dollars,—shower down, brothers, shower down! . . . five-spot an' a li'l deuce. . . . I lets it lay. . . . Shower down, brothers, shower down! . . . an' I six-aces fo' my home on high! Fade me, niggers, fade me, —I'se a mil'tary wile-cat, an' I shoots it all, . . . five an' six is 'leven! Li'l green leaves come back where at you growed. I rolls a

hund'ed an' de boat rolls me. Shower down yo' money, brothers——"

"Ten'shun!"

At the foot of the companionway stood the Lootenant. Presently he began to read out loud from a paper. "Special Orders Number 3, Headquarters First Service Battalion: Gambling on board this ship by members of this Battalion is forbidden. Offenders will be placed under arrest, in confinement and tried by Special Court. Signed: Colonel Commanding."

The Lootenant added an emphatic verbal endorsement: "If I catch any of you niggers shootin' craps I'll skin the livin' hell out of you."

The Wildcat sat on the edge of his bunk and counted up as high as he could. "I figgers I wins sumpin' like a thousan' dollahs,—an' heah is me an' de money safe an' sound."

From a sack of mail delivered on board at the hour of the ship's departure a letter addressed to the Wildcat reached him as he finished counting his money. He laid the money beside him and summoned a school nigger. "Boy, read me this here letter what she say."

The school nigger opened the pages of the letter and read it. "Letter come from Mis' Lou at de boa'din' house sayin' whah at is 'at blanket you took an' th'ee dollahs boa'd an' heah is a fo'-leaf cloveh fo' good luck, an' how is you-all? Good-by an' Lawd bless you, savin' you a jar of pussonal preserves what you likes."

"Where at's de cloveh?"

The school nigger shook a flattened green talisman from the envelope. The Wildcat picked it up. "Cloveh! Li'l cloveh, here is you and heah's mo' money whut I ever see befo' . . . money whah at is you!"

The bale of greenbacks had disappeared.

Mess call blew a minute later, but the Wildcat was not hungry.

CHAPTER III

I

Ten days later at a base port in France the ship discharged her brunet cargo. "Feet, lemme see kin you trod de ground!" The Wildcat felt middlin' good in spite of the incidental discomforts of the voyage. Explosive eggs, stewed liver and the restless rockin' round of the uncertain boat were forgotten and in their place a hundred happier impressions formed:

"I eats when I kin git it,
I sleeps mos' all de time,
I don't give a doggone if de sun don't neveh shine.
Dat's why Ise as happy as a buh-humble bee...e.....
I don't bother work an' work don't bother me!"

"Fall in!" Company C formed and counted off as far down the line as the tenth squad without getting balled up and executed a squads right that found only about half its members running wild and finally hit up a route step for the long hill which led to Camp Genicart.

"Where at is we headed for, co'pal?"

"Res' camp,—us needs rest."

At nine o'clock that night the company reached camp and dined on cold canned woolly beef and coffee. For the next three hours they erected tents and dug ditches around them and then, true to tradition, the evening clouds of the Gironde condensed to a cold rain which endured throughout the night. At midnight Squad 7, drenched and middlin' miserable, laid down on some wet straw and pulled some wet blankets over its wet anatomy.

"Whut did de Lootenant call dis camp, co'-pal?"

"Res' camp."

"Anyhow, alongside that ol' boat dis yere dry lan' feels steady like an' nacheral."

The Wildcat diverted a rivulet of rainwater that suddenly flowed under his neck. "Whut you mean, 'dry' lan'? Git to sleep!"

II

At midnight three hundred miles further along the road to Berlin a general commanding brigade headquarters lay down on a potato

sack in the corner of a roofless stone barn and smoked the front ends of three cigarettes. Then in a sulphuric bass rich with the tremolo of passion he cursed the qualified rain and the Service of Supply and called for an orderly.

"Ask one of the artillery officers to come in here a moment and then get me G. H. Q. on the wire."

The orderly saluted and faded into the adjoining room where in a manger once tenanted by a large red cow a Signal Corps man lounged in front of a twenty pair board. "Git G. H. Q. an' ring the Ol' Man when you git 'em," he ordered.

He sought another section of the barn and addressed an officer whose cold fingers were stuttering some orders into a rusty typewriter. "Sir, the General presents his compliments and wishes to see you in his quarters."

The General was sitting up on his potato sack when the artillery colonel reported. "Jim, what's the maximum H. E. barrage range for to-morrow's advance?" he asked.

"Eight miles, sir,—not over eight."

"Our front is four miles ahead of your guns, —leaving four to go. I've ordered two miles

kicked out of the line. Two miles is two miles on paper, but when the babies start it's hard to hold 'em—and if they make it five or six where in hell are they at!"

"Beyond the barrage. Where you said—the ones who get through."

The telephone beside the potato sack rang. The General spoke slowly: "General commanding Censored Brigade speaking,—let me have Artillery Staff. . . . This is General Commanding Censored Brigade. How in hell do you expect me to move my guns with these deleted, gas-damned skiddell tractors in mud ten feet deep!"

Artillery Staff at G. H. Q. yawned and asked the General what he could suggest.

The General spoke a little faster: "I suggest that you fill my requisition for mules,—that's what I suggest. Fill 'em quick and don't send any two-legged ones just because you're overstocked. I want some mules."

The General hung up the receiver and spoke to the artillery officer standing beside him: "I'll try to get you some mules, Jim. Until they get here do your best to keep the guns moved up. That's all. Good-night."

The General lay down on his potato sack and pulled his trench-coat over his head. A hundred miles away Artillery Staff smiled. "The old jug head is lonesome for his kind, so I guess I'll get him some mules."

III

At reveille the Wildcat moved himself around slowly and warped himself into shape and figgered could he sleep till 'zactly one minute before the breakfast bugle should start a stampede.

Fifteen minutes later the company circled around the cook tent absorbing seconds until even the grease was gone from the bacon pans and the coffee became a sediment of dehydrated grounds.

The Wildcat returned to his tent after breakfast and squirmed himself into his nest of saturated blankets. "Res' camp, heah's whah I gits all de res' whut is."

A moment after he had settled himself for a good sleep the Captain's striker summoned him to company headquarters. "Cap'n said come a'runnin', boy."

"What for all dis runnin' business!" the Wildcat protested. "I neveh seed such a pesterin' wah. Whah at is all dat res' camp business the Lootenant was speakin' about?"

Five minutes after the Wildcat had reported to his captain he left camp in the wake of a French officer and an interpreter and headed for a remount station. In the Wildcat's immediate charge were seven other members of C Company.

At the remount station the Wildcat and each of his companions were presented with eight mules which they conducted to a train of dinky French freight cars. Presently the squad had witnessed the flop-eared charges safely loaded on board the train. An hour later after splitting the air with whistles the engineer succumbed to the plaintive charms of the conductor's tin horn solo and the braying of sixty-four excited mules. The train departed through a maze of tracks that complicated its escape from the terminal.

The Wildcat sat in the open side door of his boxcar. Behind him to the right and left were grouped the restless hind legs of eight mules. This sinister formation endured throughout

the first day of the journey with but one interruption, during which the train stopped in the freight yards of a little town that the mules might be watered and fed.

On the evening of the third day the French officer who had traveled with his interpreter in the passenger car at the head of the train addressed the Wildcat and his two-legged associates. "You will detrain at once. The night will be spent here," said the interpreter. "At dawn the convoy will form and depart for Headquarters of the Deleted Artillery Brigade, thirty kilometers to the East."

The interpreter and the French officer sought quarters for the night in the central part of the town.

The Wildcat fed his eight mules on some hay which he borrowed from a stack in an adjoining field. At nine o'clock it began to rain. The inviting shelter of a deserted stone barn half a mile away had painted itself into the Wildcat's mental picture of his surroundings and at ten o'clock the eight mules and the Wildcat were comfortably billeted.

"At ease, mules, at ease! Don't you know a res' camp barn when you sees it? At rest!"

The Wildcat wrapped his overcoat around him and crawled into a pile of straw. "Artillery parade thirty calamities east of here,—mules you makes it easy by to-morrow. At res'!"

The Wildcat busted his previous records for long-distance sleep. Thirty hours later he woke up and felt some rested. The mules were evidently all right and it was still dark and so he went back to sleep. "Us needs rest."

About this time the Wildcat's captain read a telegram which stated that the corporal of the convoy furnished by Company C, together with eight mules, had become lost. "If I ketch that nigger," the Captain reflected, "I'll hit him with a court-martial sentence that'll age him gray in hell. I'll lose him so he'll stay lost."

IV

"I kin ride a freight train,
I don't pay no fare,
I kin ride a freight train mos' anywhere,
Dat's why I'se as happy as a buh-humble bee-e-e—
I don't bother work an' work don't bother me."

"Mules, squad yo'self east an' west an' see kin you eat dis heah cloveh field in fifteen min-

utes. Us leaves fo' de ol' artillery parade soon as I 'sorb my travel rations. You-all's got thirty calamities between you an' suppeh—us has to travel."

The Wildcat devoted the next hour to his rations. Then he strolled leisurely down to the railroad tracks to see if the convoy was ready to leave. The shock of surprise which he experienced at discovering that his companions had departed was absorbed by the knowledge that he could sleep mos' anywhere and that Uncle Sam had provided him with travel rations. He returned to the stone barn and rounded up his eight mules. He headed for the main street of the village. In the middle of the street in front of a café stood a negro soldier in a blue overcoat. The soldier carried a French rifle to which was attached a long curved bayonet.

The Wildcat, leading a string of seven mules, rode the eighth mount to where the soldier stood. "Podneh, where at is the artillery parade from here?"

The soldier with the rifle glanced at the soldier on the mule but did not reply.

"Uppity, I ax you where at is de artillery

parade where I'se consecrated to carry dese mules."

The Senegalese soldier with the rifle grunted and shook his head. The disgusted Wildcat yanked at his string of mules. "I'se seed niggers what couldn't read and niggers what couldn't write, but I never seed one befoh what couldn't talk! Come 'long here, mules! Us heads east like de Lootenant said, where de sun shines early in de mawnin'."

The Wildcat traveled down an excellent road lined on both sides with trees. He rode for three hours, encountering the motor traffic common to the roads of France in the Zone of Advance. Presently he came to a stretch of road where the smooth surface gave way to a rougher construction. The trees were no longer leafy coverings above the highway. Some of them were only shattered stumps.

At evening, seeing nothing that remotely resembled the headquarters of an artillery brigade, the Wildcat addressed the driver of a motor truck which had halted beside the road. "Where at is dis yere artille'y parade whut needs mules?"

The driver answered without turning his

head. "Up the road about ten miles." He knew nothing of artillery location, but his reply was enough to discourage further travel. The Wildcat hazed his charges along the road until he discovered a ditch in which there were a few inches of water. "Mules, us camps here." Night had fallen. The mules were picketed after the Wildcat had eaten a gratifying segment of his own rations.

The chill of the hour before dawn awakened him. He collected some splinters of wood from beneath a shattered tree which stood beside the road and lighted a fire. For perhaps five minutes he lay beside the fire absorbing its grateful heat.

Then from the sky above his head there came the moan of a motor,—a rising note that whined for an instant before the world blew up about him.

The next thing he remembered was the docile manner in which his mules submitted to his will as they galloped in the dark along the broken road.

The mules were thinking over their several sinful lives and the Wildcat was thinking kin a mule outrun an earthquake. The procession

endured for half an hour. Never for a moment was the steady gallop interrupted until the light of dawn dispelled the terror of the night.

The Wildcat looked around with an apprehensive eye. He did not like the look of the country. The terrain was marked with craters which fringed the road and expanded into the hills on either side. Strands of broken barbed wire hung from succeeding lines of posts and on either hand irregular trenches narrowed to the horizon.

"Sho' is poor farmin' land—wonder to me how folks makes any crop a-tall on lan' like dis yere. Sho' wastin' lots of good fencin' wire."

Against a strand of wire from which hung shreds of stained gray cloth the Wildcat found a sabre red with rust. The owner was nowhere to be seen and the Wildcat appropriated the weapon. "Good soa'd come in mighty handy f'r leadin' parades with when us gits home. Git up, mule!"

The Wildcat waved his sabre. His mules accelerated their pace with a lunge, and then urged to extreme endeavor, not by the Wild-

cat's yells nor by his waving blade, but by the barrage of the zero hour which rocked the earth around them, the eight mules charged across a field which suddenly began to bloom with shrapnel.

"Mules, de Lawd is our Shepherd,—us needs some gin!" The Wildcat saw some gray clad figures running toward him out of the smoke. They were without weapons and their arms were upraised.

"White folks, come heah!" With his sword the Wildcat waved at the men in gray. They came running toward him. "How does us git out of dis heah wah?"

"Kamerad, kamerad!"

"Gimme ride, gimme ride,—git on dese heah mules an' ride. Us gwine f'm dis wah sudden. Git on! Us leaves now!"

The Wildcat and seven mules loaded with bosches started away from the war. Each mule except that one which the Wildcat rode carried two or three riders and alongside the group, seeking the false security of companionship, twenty additional prisoners had coagulated from the mob of their fellows.

Thus escorted, the Wildcat rode through the

wave of the first advance and the supports. He arrived finally at a zone of comparative quiet within the French lines where he was confronted by a group of French officers standing beside a mud-splashed racing car. One of them, a tired looking gentleman whose stars of rank were as bright as the keen gray eyes with which he surveyed the Wildcat, spoke to an officer beside him. The officer approached the Wildcat.

"Is it that you alone, monsieur, armed only with a sabre, retrieve these prisoners?"

The Wildcat did not understand many of these high sounding words. "Yes, suh, gin'ral —me an' dese yere artill'y parade mules was alone an' runnin' an' up come some white folks, —'gimme ride, gimme ride'—an' I lets 'em ride an' heah us is."

The French officer patted the Wildcat on the shoulder: "My brave! Of such is your glorious army. The general Americaine shall be informed. Your name, and of what regiment?"

The Wildcat fished for his identity tag. "Cop'al Vitus Marsden, 953,497, Company C,

Fust Service Battalion, fr'm Memphis, Ten-o-see."

The officer recorded the data in his notebook. He held his hand out to the Wildcat in parting. "And now, brave corporal, adieu!"

"Gin'ral, yessuh, an' kin you-all tell me where at is headquarters artillery parade?"

"Headquarters? . . . but yes . . . it is of the adjoining artillery headquarters that you speak. A courier shall accompany you as guide."

The Wildcat accumulated his mules. The "gimme ride" white folks had disappeared. A French soldier mounted one of the mules. "Come wiz me," he said. As the Wildcat rode past the French officers they saluted him. "Adieu soldier of what bravery!"

CHAPTER IV

I

At Brigade Headquarters the adjutant accomplished a memorandum receipt for the eight mules and signed a travel order for the Wildcat.

An orderly delivered the documents. "Whut does I do now?" asked the Wildcat when the orders were handed him.

"Read your orders."

"Kaint read dis yere writin'—whut does she say?"

The orderly glanced at the pages. "She says git t'hell back where you come from."

"Where at does I go?"

"Ketch a truck to Chemin Blanc and hit th' rattler fr'm there south."

"Where at does I git me a ticket an' rations?"

"You don't need no ticket except them orders and you draws rations wherever you're at from the A. E. F. troops. On your way—on your way."

The arrangement was perfect except that the Wildcat's orders were not transportation on French passenger trains and that A. E. F. troops were not serving meals at all points along the lines of the S. O. S. south of Chemin Blanc.

The Wildcat completed the two-day journey in eight days and landed A. W. O. L. in the guardhouse at the base port from which his company had marched to their rest camp. The provost marshal telephoned the commanding officer of the Wildcat's company. "Nigger with some stale orders by the name of Vitus Marsden just picked up, Captain. Will you come down to-morrow and get him?"

The captain cooled down enough to explain that the blankety blank Wildcat wasn't due for anything less than a lynching and that the provost marshal might as well keep him penned up until sentence had been imposed.

The sergeant of the guard locked the Wildcat in a special apartment reserved for bad military eggs. "Sergeant, I'se hon'gry; when does I draw my rations?"

"You won't need no rations after the firin' squad gits through with you."

The Wildcat tried to figure out the nature of his offenses. "Guess mebbe us oughta lef' ol' sword layin' gin' de wire. Nobody 'ceptin' gin'rals has swords as fine as dat . . . wondeh when does the firin' squab shoot me . . . wisht I could see de Lootenant. . . ."

That night, alone save for the cooties abandoned by a former occupant of the solitary, the Wildcat slept middlin' miserable.

II

The Captain made quick work of the Wildcat's case. The Manual of Courts Martial yielded several gratifying charges, amplified by a series of specifications which bade fair to imprison the Wildcat for a hundred years.

Except for a ride both ways in a truck and a chance to plead guilty to everything, the Wildcat gained nothing from the trial of his case. The Special Court dished out a copious measure of punishment in a brief sentence and the documents went forward to the General commanding the Base Section.

There came a morning later in the week when upon the General's wide desk the charge

sheets in the Wildcat's case awaited the signature of the Base Commander. Attached to the charge sheets were three letters. Beside these documents lay two small packages.

The General glanced through the charges and specifications. He read the sentence of the Court and reached for his pen. The attached letters fixed his attention. He read the first letter and sat forward in his chair. He threw away his cigarette and jabbed at a push button. "Take my car down to the Provost Marshal's place at once and return with a negro prisoner who is in confinement,—Vitus Marsden,—First Service Battalion." The colonel saluted and departed on his mission.

The General opened one of the small packages which lay on his desk. He read the third letter attached to the charge sheets of the Special Court. "Well I'm damned!" He opened the other package and removed its contents,—"doubly damned!" He again read each of the three letters after which he jabbed at the push button. Another colonel entered the room. "I want all of my staff officers in here at once, the officers attached, the French liaison officers and

any members of Headquarters' Staff who may be in the building."

He reached for his telephone and talked for a few seconds to the French general commanding the district.

Presently the great room was filled with half a hundred colonels, lieutenant-colonels and majors. The French general and his staff entered the room and for a moment the assemblage stood at rigid attention.

And then, itching promiscuously, and looking pretty measly alongside of so much congested military rank, the Wildcat shuffled into the room.

The General raised his hand. The officers in the room snapped to attention.

"Sergeant Vitus Marsden," the General began, "in effecting the capture of thirty-seven of the enemy you have won the Distinguished Service Cross."

The General pinned the decoration on the Wildcat's blouse above the place where the Wildcat's heart was missing every fourth flop.

The French general and his adjutant stepped forward. "Sergeant Vitus Marsden, brave soldier of the American Expeditionary

Forces, in the name of the French Republic, by orders of the Commander of the Armies of France, for extraordinary heroism receive the Croix de Guerre!"

The general took the decoration from its case and pinned it fast beside the Distinguished Service Cross.

The Wildcat sensed the reversal of his fate.

"Gin'ral, I is sho' proud to meet you." He glanced downward at the green cross upon his breast. "Looks a lot like a fo'-leaf cloveh."

That night in Company C the Wildcat was a nach'ral seven. Scratching himself industriously he looked long at the sergeant's chevrons on his sleeve and the colored ribbons with their pendant crosses.

"Dat's why I'se as happy as a buh-humble bee-e-e. . . ."

CHAPTER V

I

At the far end of the St. Sulpice railroad yards the Wildcat started his spiking crew on its clattering career after which he declared a personal furlough for himself on the strength of his Croix de Guerre.

His captain was some place else and the Lootenant was out of sight and so the Wildcat ceased his struggle toward making the world safe for Democracy. He reached around back of his head and picked a bunch of grapes from a discouraged vine in whose shade he was doing the best he could to rest himself. He ate two or three of the grapes and threw the rest of the bunch at a saddle colored water-boy who was sprawled out on the warm ground beside him.

"Lizard," he said, "how come grapes is free an' no good, but when dese French folks makes wine f'm 'em us niggers pays money for it an' like as not finishes up cote martialed?"

The Lizard assembled his organs of speech

from where they were festooned around the lower part of his face. "Wilecat, how come? Pusson'ly I likes dis yere coon-yak f'r sudden action."

"Ruckus juice, boy. Ruckus juice an' best let be,—'ceptin' when you gits a all-day pass to Bo'deaux on a Sat'day an' they ain't no mo' work befo' Monday."

"Water . . . boy! Water me like a mule!" Somebody in the Wildcat's spiking gang was thirsty. The Lizard accumulated himself and started away down the track with his water bucket. A mile down the yard the quitting whistle screeched. "Tell 'em to pick up their tools an' bring 'em in," the Wildcat called after him.

He started to walk to camp, two miles away. "Where at is my l'il easy rider gone? . . ." Halfway to camp where the rising masses of the half-completed warehouses of the great storage depot broke the horizon the Wildcat halted and looked around. Pretty soon he found what he was looking for. He walked over to a pile of scrap lumber against which lay an old gunnysack. From the sack he drew forth a quart bottle of white wine. He sought

the secluded interior of an adjoining warehouse and for five minutes he applied himself to the task in hand. "Vinegar juice, jazz my trailin' feet." Before he reached camp he was feeling middlin' agile.

The Captain's striker, a New Orleans brunet barely able to eat several times a day when he was not playing a guitar, sat in the doorway of the Wildcat's quarters. "Cinnamon, you measly dog-robbeh, how is you?" the Wildcat asked in greeting.

"Poo'ly in de flesh but my spirit's rollin' high," the troubadour replied. "I'se Bo'deaux boun' in de mawnin' " he added.

"How come?"

"Cap'n detailed me special to roun' him up some mushrooms an' roosterfire sauce an' some mo' fixin's fo' a dinneh he's givin' to-morr' night."

"Whut day's dis?"

"Friday."

"Cinnamon, you sure has a drag with ol' Lady Luck. Heah you is triflin' roun' all day, 'terpretin' a little account you speaks N'O'leans French whilst us boys busts ourselves buildin' railroads. What us boys needs is mo' pleasure

an' less work. Wish ol' pay boat was whis'lin' roun' de bend. Mebbe us work han's could git to Bo'deaux wuz pay day heah."

"Some is lucky and some is rich,—pay horn sound some day, Wilecat."

"I ain't both. See kin you find me a Memphis Blues in de groan box. I likes it."

Cinnamon snatched a handful of melody from his guitar. From around the corner of the barracks an orderly trotted in search of the Wildcat. "Wilecat, Cap'n says burn yo' feet arrivin' at his quarters."

"I never seed such a pesterin' war!" The Wildcat dragged his way to the Captain's quarters. "Wondeh did some guard see me wrastlin' ol' demon wine an' tell Cap'n."

Generally the Wildcat had a clouded conscience. He disliked interviews with white folks,—particularly the officers of his company. "They knows me—wondeh what I'se 'criminated for now."

With the Captain was a stranger who called himself "Special Representer of the Colored Heroes' Home Tie Band." He was a goggle-eyed mulatto product in linoleum puttees whose mission in life was to impose an uplifting in-

fluence on soldiers who could get along fine without it.

"Sir, Sergeant Vitus Marsden repo'ts to Cap'n." The Wildcat stood at rigid attention.

"Wildcat, how many of you boys can dance?"

"Cap'n, yessuh!" The Wildcat's relief had him twisted a little bit.

"Boy, listen to me. I asked you how many of you boys know how to dance."

"Cap'n, suh, mos' all kin dance some,—some knows all the steps what is an' some makes up as they rambles along."

"How many of them can read?"

"Cap'n, suh, they's 'at boy Cinnamon an' DeWitt Massey an' five o' six triflin' school niggers an Cube an' de Backslid Baptis' an' . . . mebbe a dozen all told,—but mos' of 'em is field hands." The Wildcat looked sideways at the Special Representer.

"Wildcat, that spiking crew of yours don't give you enough work to keep you out of trouble. From now on I'm goin' to work you day and night. I'll issue an order to-night detailin' you to help Special Representer Huntington Boone with amusements and entertainments

and educational work for the company. Whatever he wants, you do. Can you read and write?"

"Cap'n, suh, I learned my letters but I neveh learned my words,—'ceptin' to speak 'em."

"You join on one of the night school classes then. Railroad work durin' the day, night school and entertainments for the company at night,—I guess that'll hold you. You do whatever Boone wants you to do. That's all."

"Cap'n, yessuh. Thank you, suh." The Wildcat rendered a perfect salute, stumbled over a wastebasket and in company with the Special Representer made his exit.

II

Before the Wildcat had reached his quarters the potential alibis of his immediate future had him dazed. "If they asks me where at was you 'stid of runnin' them spikin' niggers I says Special Representer Honey Tone Boone had me detailed. If ol' Special Representer says why ain't I here I says Honey Tone I was 'cumulatin' some boards f'r some seats f'r a show

us boys is plannin' or somethin',—an' all de time me an' Cinnamon might be in Bo'deaux projectin' roun'."

The Special Representer's accomplice steered a course to the company kitchen and started in to uplift a roast beef sandwich after he had absorbed a shot of lemon extract.

At his quarters he encountered Cinnamon seated in the doorway. Cinnamon looked up at him. "Whut did Cap'n do to you, Wilecat?"

"Man, O man! Us boys is goin' to have a meetin' every night,—shows an' cuttin' de buck an' night school an' a general ruckus! Ol' Honey Tone runs ol' night school an' I'se in charge of—of the Gran' Military Lodge of Pleasure. Dat's me! Boy, distribute some melody. My feet feels triflin'."

At suppertime every member of the company made a verbal application for active membership in the Lodge of Pleasure. At nine o'clock that night an order issued putting the Wildcat in charge of amusements for the Company under the direction of the Special Representer. By the time taps sounded the Wildcat had dreamed a dozen plans wherein the Lodge of

Pleasure would become a source of personal benefit to himself and a select group of his intimates who could remember to return favors.

"Lady Luck,—at yo' feet, at yo' feet!"

Next morning before work call sounded the Special Representer sought the Wildcat. "Sergeant, what entertainin' games can you suggest for the boys?" Honey Tone was beginning to function as an uplifter.

"They likes Policy, Sick Horse an' Poker, some,—but mos'ly they's got cube craze."

The Special Representer was not entirely clear on the subject of cube craze.

"Clickin' golf," the Wildcat explained,—"Gallopin' dominoes where you collects on seven, 'leven an' yo' point."

"Fo'bid by regulations. You go to Bordeaux to-day and buy five or ten sets of regular dominoes an' checkers an' some slates and pencils an' to-night we starts some 'musements in the company mess hall. I'll get you a pass now an' you can come back on the seven o'clock train to-night."

"Where at's de money?" The Wildcat was coldly practical even in the ecstasy of his freedom.

The Special Representer returned from the Captain's quarters with a pass for the Wildcat. He handed him the pass and a fifty franc note. "The Captain's orderly is going to Bordeaux this morning. You go with him and he can interpret for you. To-night the entertainment will consist of a ten-minute lecture, games, maybe a song or two and educational features for the first class in reading and writing."

"Honey Tone—yo' sho' is a whirlwind. Us niggers is needed you a long time. I'se on mah way." The Wildcat galloped around the corner of the barracks in search of Cinnamon. "Boy," he said when he found him, "boy, you is goin' to Bo'deaux, is you—well,—you an' me both!"

"How come?"

"Lodge o' Pleasure business. Ol' Honey Tone details me fo' gettin' dominoes an' checkers an' slates an' some mo' utensils fo' a gran' ruckus what starts when we gits back to-night. If you is ready, le's go! I'se rarin' f'r action."

The pair started down the track toward the station which lay half a mile from the barracks. Presently the train dragged itself out of the

distance and while the conductor and engineer and their several grimy accomplices were consuming a wine ration the Wildcat and Cinnamon climbed into a third-class compartment. In the compartment were half a dozen negro soldiers from the French Congo country.

"Crowd in, Cinnamon,—what fo' you holdin' back?"

"These boys gin'ally has cooties, Wilecat, an' you know what Cap'n did to me las' time I got 'fested."

"Boy, git in! What's troublin' you, you'se 'fraid you'll have to steam yo' raiment—I never seed such a fool fo' clothes. Git in!"

The Wildcat boosted Cinnamon into the crowded compartment and wedged him into a space between Libenga Zongo and Pala Dikoa, two childish fighting men from Cameroun.

Cinnamon produced a cigarette from his pocket and lighted it. "Boy, gimme one o' dem cigarettes whut Cap'n smokes." The Wildcat held out his hand. "Gimme dat deck,—mebbe dese boys smokes." He handed a cigarette to each of the African battlers. They exhibited the delightful embarrassment of children. By cold comparative statistics an American ciga-

rette meant more to each of them than a week's pay.

Presently the accomplished Cinnamon addressed Dikoa in New Orleans French. The Wildcat's eyes rolled with second-hand pride. "Cinnamon, you sure does beat all! How come you talks dis boom-a-loom talk to blue-coat niggers whilst I'se speechless?"

"They speaks French."

"Go 'long—is they Lou'sana boys or is you lyin' to me?"

"Man, I'm tellin' you these furlough niggers is French, 'ceptin' the skin."

"Sho' is a crazy rig,—far as I'se listened they's plumb dum. Wuz I penned up 'long with these boys an' us was hogs I couldn't grunt 'Good mawnin'' to 'em if I was stuck wid a Barlow. How come these furlong boys is niggers an' French both?"

The problem was too deep for Cinnamon.

"I'm goin' to ask ol' Special Representer about 'em when we gits back. I bet ol' Honey Tone can 'splain all about furlong niggers an' why is they."

The Wildcat's scientific contemplation endured until a cartload of bananas at the exit of

the Bastide station in Bordeaux distracted him. "Cinnamon, wait 'til I gits me a hand o' bananas and a pocket o' goobers." Thenceforth across the stone bridge which spans the Garonne the Wildcat's munching jaws kept time with his marching feet.

"Keep yo' bottom jaw still an' chew with th' top half of yo' haid an' save yo' stren'th, Wilecat." Cinnamon was mildly critical.

"What yo' mean?" The Wildcat looked sideways at his companion like a mule.

"I means yo' is overloadin' yo' neck. Come oveh heah an' us'll git us a r'ar of coon-yak."

By the time the pair reached Rue Ste. Catherine the Wildcat was stepping heavy. "Sho' is gran' that streets cross each other,—else where at would they put these gratifyin' café saloons. I'se a blue-coat battler an' I talks boom-a-loom talk. Cinnamon, you dressed-up preacheh, come on in dis French sto' an' tell ol' mister man I wants some fancy clo's." The Wildcat dragged his companion into a tailor shop and presently the tailor was running down the dimensions of the Wildcat's anatomy. "Tell dis man I wants de grandes' clo's what is. I needs 'em f'r mah Lodge o' Pleasure."

The Wildcat left the tailor shop staggering under a contract to deliver six hundred francs within two weeks from that time in return for which he was to receive two olive drab uniforms,—"a skin tight one f'r Sundays an' a loose hung one f'r week days."

CHAPTER VI

I

The pair proceeded to a near-by café. "Us gits one li'l dram mo' of coon-yak an' then us gits de chores done,—slates an' dominoes an' yo' roosterfish sauce an' dem fixin's f'r Cap'n."

Seated near them in front of the café were several groups of blue-coated furlong niggers talking their boom-a-loom talk. The Wildcat offered one of them a cigarette and was immediately surrounded by a dozen of them.

"Set down, field han's, set down. Pacify yo'selves. Cinnamon, how come all dese boys idlin' roun' here 'stid of workin'?"

Cinnamon derived a few statistics from his subsequent conversation and relayed it to the Wildcat.

"Sho' beats all," the Wildcat reflected aloud, "us boys workin' day and night an' goin' on ten thousan' boom-a-loom furlong niggers restin' here all de time in Bo'deaux."

"They changes off," Cinnamon explained. "Sticks Germans a year wid bay'nets an' blows

'em up wid powdeh an' gits a week's furlong f'r it."

The Wildcat evidenced a trace of sympathetic curiosity. Through the accomplished Cinnamon he investigated front-line conditions. "Whut does they git to eat?"

Cinnamon enlarged upon the bread and wine ration, sleeping conditions, cooties, cognac and combat. "Wilecat, is you figgerin' on a shiftin' roun' some?"

"Not now,—but I was jest ponderin'."

"How come?"

"Boy,—suppose Cap'n say 'lay a mile o' sidetrack'—us lays it. Then suppose it rains that night an' ol' Napoleon or Sara Jane or some other hay burnin' enjine gits lonely an' starts 'cross th' fields fo' a visit with them main line enjines. Cap'n says 'burn yo' feet gittin' that enjine back on de track an' git dis wreck cleared up'—us does it . . . up all night mebbe." The Wildcat was silent.

Cinnamon looked at him inquiringly. "Well, whut of it! Drink yo' ruckus juice an' le's ramble."

"An' ten thousand boom-a-loom niggers loafin' close by in Bo'deaux," the Wildcat con-

tinued. "Cinnamon,—us feeds good. Us is got tobacco an' mo' cigarettes whut these furlong niggers ever saw,—you tell 'em I says does they want two heavy meals ev'ry day an' all de cigarettes they can chew, all they got to do is hunt me up at St. Sulpice, ready f'r goin' to work."

Cinnamon opened his eyes and then dropped his lazy lids. "Where at is uniforms f'r dese niggers."

"The Wildcat met him. "Us is loaded down with spare clo's. Ol' Supply Sergeant got mo' in case we runs out."

The proposition was presented, with due elaboration, to the furlong niggers. Cinnamon turned to the Wildcat. "They wants to know when they can start in."

"Tell 'em I kin use a hundred han's all de time an' work starts Monday."

And thus from a mixed parentage of lassitude and ruckus juice was born the illegal boom-a-loom contract which later strained the diplomatic eloquence of a dozen Sam Browned defenders of Democracy.

II

The Wildcat and his companion said farewell to their furlong friends and left the café in search of the sauce for the Captain's banquet and the various instruments for use in the Special Representer's uplift movement. At evening, their mission accomplished, the pair sauntered back across the stone bridge which led to the Bastide Station.

The Wildcat looked down at the ebbing tide. "How come dis yere riveh runs one way in de mawnin' an' backwards at night? Sho' is runnin' upstream."

"Boy, you is so full of ruckus juice you sees twisted."

"I sees all dem big steamboats layin' downstream where they was dis mawnin', an' they's there yet. This mawnin' ol' riveh was runnin' to'ards 'em an' now it's headed dis way."

Cinnamon's seaboard science was equal to the occasion. The Wildcat got his first lesson in tidewater tactics. "A boy could ride f'm one town to another without rowin' a-tall," he remarked. "I gits in a ol' skiff here an' by noon I'se downstream at Pole-yak. Den I sees

Royan where de Lannick Ocean is. Den de ol' riveh turns roun' an' fo' long heah I is. Cinnamon, you liah, you'se crazy o' I'se twisted roun'."

En route to the St. Sulpice camp the Wildcat perfected his plans for utilizing the wasted energy of the boom-a-loom niggers. By the time he arrived at the St. Sulpice station his project was established on a working basis in which he would discover no flaw. He and Cinnamon lagged along the road from the railway station to their camp until Retreat had sounded. Then they made a rapid march for the cook-house. The Wildcat burdened himself with a sagging mess-kit and finished dinner in third place for quantity consumed. "I could of et mo', but I'se had a hard day,—mah stren'th faded f'm workin' in Bo'deaux." He walked to his barracks and laid down on his bunk. "Boy," he said to one of his companions, "when dat triflin' Cinnamon gits through at Cap'n's mess table tell him to fetch de groan box heah an' play me Memphis Blues. I likes it."

"Wilecat, ain't you heard the news?"

"How come?"

"Gran' ruckus to-night—ol' Honey Tone

gives us a talk an' starts in educatin' us an' den——"

The Wildcat sat up and groaned. "I plumb forgot," he interrupted. "Here I is, bow-legged with work an' boun' to help ol' Special Representer. Wish I was a furlong boom-a-loom nigger, 'stead of 'sponsible foh dis Lodge o' Pleasure business."

The obligation which rank imposes and the reaction of ruckus juice wrastlin' with three pounds of assorted rations rested heavily upon the Wildcat's conscience all the way from his stomach to where his head was going roun' an' roun'. At seven o'clock when the Special Representer found him, the Wildcat was feeling forty miles from noble.

"You rig up two blankets for curtains tonight and a stage out of planks at one end of the mess hall and some lights and have it ready at eight o'clock. That's when the show starts." Honey Tone was a creature whose motto was action and lots of it, as long as somebody else did the work.

"Whut show?" the Wildcat asked.

"First I'll give a ten-minute lecture, then

we'll have some music an' then the educational features will take place."

At eight o'clock the improvised stage and its settings were completed. In appropriate places along the mess tables were dominoes and slates and checker boards. As soon as the doors were opened the long room filled with its audience. The doors were closed and presently the house warmed up to where it had the classic cavern of Calcutta gasping for breath. Various individuals in the audience began to shine darkly. Some of them, perspiring freely, began to itch. When the scratching had developed a general cadence the curtain on the stage parted and the Wildcat became visible through the pungent vapor that billowed above the Lodge of Pleasure. Part of the Wildcat's tongue was carried in his mouth, but most of it was draped carelessly around his chin. "Ten'-shun!" he began. "Us is 'sembled to listen to Misto Honey Tone Boone, Special Representer of the Cul'led Heroes' Home Tie Band."

"Dogged if it ain't ol' Wilecat!"

"Ten'shun,—let ol' Wilecat preach does he crave to."

"Us boys needs rest," the Wildcat con-

tinued, "an' Honey Tone figgers he has some to spare. I bows to de speaker ob de evenin', Special Representer Boone." The Wildcat withdrew behind the curtains.

The linoleum leggins squeaked three or four times and Honey Tone faced his latest problem in uplifts. He bowed grandly, to starboard, to port and dead ahead, into a sea of pop-eyed faces. The improvised stage curtains closed behind him . . . and behind the curtain a gentle interrupted clicking of ivory cubes on pine planks became audible.

"Ignorance is the curse of the human race," Honey Tone began. "Specially in colored boys like you-all. In my humble way I propose to eradicate yo' ignorance by learnin' you the rudiments of knowledge. First of all, my hearers, I wants statistices on you-all. How many of you ain't never learned to read,—stand up if you never learned to read."

Nearly the entire audience stood up.

When they were again seated several places near each door were vacant. The clicking behind the curtains became more persistent.

"To-night after a short discourse from a book by Mr. Charles Darwin, the reading class

will be inaugurated," the Special Representer continued.

"Read 'em an' weep,—I lets it lay." A hoarse whisper punctuated a lull in the gentle clicking behind the stage curtains. Honey Tone heard it and rubbed the index finger of his right hand with his thumb.

"For forty years Mister Charles Darwin pestered himself tryin' to figger out the famous scientific problem which he personally propounded to some of the brightest lights of learnin' on earth, to wit, whether the chicken or the egg come first. Then he 'vestigated all sorts of animals an' their descendants f'm the ark includin' us an' foun' out we was all baboon's nephews. In his most notorious book, the 'Origin of Speechless,' which I have chosen for my text to-night he proves the Bible was right. You all is seen these blue-coat niggers from Africa, an' you has asked yourself, "How come they dumb as far as our language is concerned?" To-night I tells you how come, by readin' you the first chapter of the book where it clears up the point why the animals lef' the ark two an' two. . . ."

"Lily Joe! Two an' two is fo'! Shoots it

all!" The stage curtains bulged slightly toward the Special Representer.

Honey Tone produced a book from his pocket and stepped back a pace. He began to read.

The string suspending the stage curtain broke. Around a lantern at the back of the narrow stage knelt the Wildcat and twenty of his associates. . . . "Come seven!"

"Wuz hard luck a dewdrop," the Wildcat later explained to Cinnamon, "I mus' be a lake."

CHAPTER VII

I

Before work call blew next morning the Wildcat hunted up his companion of the previous day's journey. "Cinnamon, how much did them clo'es come to what 'at man showed us yes'day?"

"You is in fo' six hundred francs fo' two sets. Me,—I jes drug along an' said 'Mebbe.'"

"How much in money is dat?"

"Odds on frog jack runs of six to one,—say a hund'ed dollahs."

"I'd had it made las' night 'ceptin' Honey Tone hadn't stopped us boys' pleasure when ol' curtain string busted an' 'splayed us." The Wildcat dragged to his work at the lower end of the yard. He was silent until he reached the first fringing house of a village which lay midway of the terminals. He stopped suddenly and called to a member of his crew which followed him. "Levi Slaughter, come heah!"

The designated victim approached his sergeant. "You speaks some French,—come 'long

wid me." The pair diverted their course and presently stood before the proprietor of one of the houses. "Ask him how much grass cuttin' kin he do alone?"

The question was accomplished with appropriate gestures. To the reply, via his interpreter, the Wildcat issued an ultimatum. "Tell ol' gobbler us is aimin' to run tracks plum through his hay an' his vegetable an' his grape vines some day nex' week, an' kin he git 'em cleared away by Wen'sday."

Levi Slaughter complied with the Wildcat's command.

After the calisthenics of the oriental dance which the Frenchman immediately staged had quieted to a series of convulsions no more strenuous than the Australian crawl stroke, the Wildcat played his ace. "Tame him some! I rents field han's, tell him, fo' a franc a day, eight hours work, an' seein' it's him he kin have a hund'ed Monday to he'p him harvest befo' us comes th'oo wid de tracks. I aims not to downtrod him none, an' if his fren's needs niggers, mebbe I kin git 'em some mo'."

With wages for farm labor ten francs a day and none to be had except indifferent bosche

prisoners the Wildcat's offer looked like the keys to the Bank of France. The farmer surged at the bait and the verbal contract was accomplished.

"Slaughter is yo' name an' yo' lives up to it, pussonally, if yo' lets out what yo' 'ficially 'terpreted jes' now." The Wildcat sealed the lips of his companion with a vivid outline of what a military execution felt like. "They gin'ally shoots low an' yo' dies wid stummick misery ten days afteh ol' firin' squad vaccinates yo'."

The interpreter looked around him. "Wilecat, dis is 'twixt us. Mah mouf, I uses mos'ly on rations. Wuz keepin' it shut a dime I'se a millionaire."

II

On Sunday night the first straggling members of the boom-a-loom clan passed through San Loubes headed for St. Sulpice. At dawn on Monday morning the road between Izon and St. Sulpice was lined with the Wildcat's recruits. At breakfast a prowling member of the Wildcat's company remarked the presence of the strangers.

"Woods is swarmin' full of French niggers

—must a seed a million 'twixt here an' de low groun' by de riveh."

The Wildcat hunted up the supply sergeant. "Us boys needs mo' work clo'es. Han'lin' rail an' ties wears out them oveh-alls faster'n you issues 'em. Turn me oveh 'bout a hund'ed suits." The hundred suits of blue denims were issued and delivered to the lower yard where presently they were to drape the figures of the Congo crew.

Before he went to work the Wildcat confronted the mess sergeant in the cook house. "Grasty, me an' you is fren's, mostly, ain't we?"

Sergeant Grasty indorsed the statement. "I says us is, Wilecat—look at de lemon extract I lets you drink. How come you inquirin'—ain't you advanced me ten francs, what I neveh paid back—us sho' is fren's. How come?"

"Nothin'—only I hates to see you git slaughtered by a band o' worthless field han's 'count o' not feedin' 'em heavy 'nuf rations. Lunch what yo' sends out where we's workin' ain't half enough—so they claims. They's plannin' to uprise 'gin yo' an' deprive ten or fifteen poun's o' meat off yo' carcass 'less you

feeds 'em mo'. 'At's all I knows. You knows it now."

At noon there was more than enough extra lunch for the hundred grunting boom-a-loom brunets.

The supper problem was more difficult. The Wildcat sought out the Special Representer immediately after work was over for the day. "Honey Tone dese field han's is steeped in sin —'spose you preaches a snort of 'ligion each evenin' befo' suppeh to 'em. They sho' needs it. They's willin' boys, but they's soggy wid ruckus juice. They craves de worldly pleasure like gravy an' side meat whut gratifys de belly but pollutes de soul. Head 'em roun' to glory an' away f'm grub. Yo' is de shepard wif de crook to guide 'em straight."

The limelight urge welled strong at the Wildcat's pleading. Honey Tone rounded up a hosanna vocabulary before the Wildcat had engineered the assembling of his company and presently the tar-paper walls of the mess hall vibrated with the resonant syllables of reproach that the Special Representer hurled at his humid victims.

The Wildcat, consuming a pork chop in the

kitchen end of the mess hall, listened in. "Hot damn!" he exclaimed, "Grasty—was big words cooties, Honey Tone sho' would itch! Lissen at him go!"

"Wuz words music he's de whole brass band," Sergeant Grasty agreed.

The Wildcat attached himself to another ration of lemon extract and then started from the kitchen. He turned to the mess sergeant on his way out. "Whilst I thinks of it, if they's any grub left over f'm supper save it. They's some boys down de road what just 'rived in an' they might be hongry. I'll come in after supper an' git it."

After supper three-fourths of the food which had been prepared for supper remained in the kitchen. "Honey Tone sho' fed 'em language,—sho' preached 'em sick," the Wildcat commented. He rounded up a detail of trusted assistants and carried the food to the jungles near the river which flowed along beside the project. About their several tribal fires lay the boom-a-loom band.

When the Congo children had eaten and were rolled content beside the fires the Wildcat mentally reviewed the mechanics of the day's

intrigue. Step by step he traced the details of his project and as each element of the program presented its factor of feasibility his dream of easy money expanded.

"Five hund'ed niggers is jes' as easy as one. Five hund'ed is 'at many francs. Five an' five is twelve and twice twelve is two dozen an' two mo' days to a week comes to mo' money 'n I kin count—but startin' at a hund'ed niggers what I has now is a hund'ed francs a day. An' six days is what de tailor says two suits costs. To-morr' I collects up."

The next day the Wildcat collected up. For every member of his crew he obtained a franc from the French farmer for whom they worked.

III

Thursday night found the Wildcat in possession of four hundred francs. On Thursday night his friend Cinnamon suggested that the blue uniforms of the boom-a-loom niggers could be rented to any member of the Fust Service Battalion who might desire a day in Bordeaux unmolested by the ever-present Mili-

tary Police of the A. E. F. On Friday this new strand of gain was woven into the widening web of profitable affairs.

"Cinnamon, us sho' goes to town to-morr'. I got to get me my clo'es an' a watch an' some mo' fixin's—you git a pass f'm Cap'n an' us'll have one gran' ruckus."

Late Friday night the Wildcat rounded up the Special Representer. "Honey Tone, get me a pass f'r all day to-morr' f'm Cap'n an' I brings you back a bottle of coon-yak."

The Special Representer bound himself to deliver an all-day pass for two bottles of ruckus juice. "But how come yo' has so much free cash an' pay-day a mile away?"

The Wildcat laid his affluence to fortune's favors in the game where a boy collects on seven, 'leven and his point.

"Wildcat, teach me that game. At school we never played sin games—I never learned it."

The Wildcat laid down a silver franc and from their sanctuary in a pocket of his uniform he produced a pair of dice.

"Fade me—git yo' money in sight. On seven, 'leven an' my point I wins. If I dooce,

trays or twelves I loses—an' I loses on seven afteh I come out."

The Wildcat rolled a careless brace of ivory and lost on a sneakin' seven. The Special Representer risked a healthy five spot and dragged down after his fourth pass.

Once in his student course the Special Representer reached his right hand into his pocket. He rubbed his fingers lightly over a lump of rosin which he carried therein.

"Wilecat, I shoots a hundred francs," he said.

Presently, beside the lump of rosin in the Special Representer's pocket there lay a crumpled roll amounting to five hundred francs.

"Wilecat," who ever'd thought I'd win all yo' money. Sho' is a interestin' game." The Special Representer sought to dull the barbs of his success.

"Sho' is interestin' luck—yo' missed winnin' a million dollahs—how come I neveh had it."

The Wildcat sought the comparative solitude of his bunk where presently the false solace of to-morrow's dawn lightened the heavy present shadows of despair. He reflected that a

week would bring in another sum equal to that which he had lost and that a few hundred francs was a negligible amount to a boy whose income was practically unlimited. "Say a thousand boom-a-looms workin' a month—an' each one a-bringin' in a franc a day an' us stayin' here on this job six months more——"

Cinnamon came through the door. "Niggers," he announced, "I jest finished packin' Cap'n's trunks. Us leaves in de mawnin' to work at Bassens Docks—we is in dis Race to Berlin unloadin' boats."

"Lady Luck," the Wildcat groaned, "good-by, good-by."

IV

The impact of financial defeat was softened for the Wildcat by the hard work incidental to the stress of his transition from railroad building to that of unloading the first ships of the cargo fleet which had begun to reach the ports of France. All his vain dreams of questionable gain were drowned in honest sweat.

"Where I loses heaviest, Cinnamon, was on them boom-a-loom boys what I could hired out at a franc a day," the Wildcat explained.

"Down here they ain't no chance to rent out field han's."

But the groups of French furlong niggers persistently hung around the barracks of the Fust Service Battalion near the docks. Pay day came with its temporary gain and the Wildcat circulated among his fellow scientists for a space of ten minutes, rolling the while, a pair of Jonah dice. The Special Representer, undergoing his sophomore course, relieved the Wildcat of his last franc. "Easy come, easy go. Whut I don't see is how come yo' always wins, Honey Tone."

"Beginner's luck, Wildcat." Honey Tone made five successive passes.

"I'se seed 'em killed f'r less——"

"Rub me back of the ears! They's wild blood in my veins."

Honey Tone, the tyro, began to talk to the dice. "Shoots a hundred. . . . Wedge-shaped babies, wedge 'em loose. Five an' three is eight. . . . I'se an eighter f'm Decatur. Fo' an' fo' is eight. Shoots two hundred—mawnin' seven! I fills poorhouses wid my luck——"

The Wildcat, a busted bystander, turned away from the scene of the slaughter with a

grunt. "Dis yere Special Representer sho' is de sudden learninest, fast findin'-outest, pass-flingin' nigger I eveh seed." He sought his friend Cinnamon and reviewed a scene or two of the Special Representer's private play.

" 'Pears like 'at nigger got deprived loose of his ignorance mighty sudden," Cinnamon volunteered.

"Mebbe he's been—representin'." The Wildcat hesitated in voicing his indictment.

"Mebbe."

That night at taps an informal financial census indicated that the Special Representer was in possession of half the payroll that the Fust Service Battalion had received. Cinnamon listened to the various reports and whispered a final summary to the Wildcat. "Honey Tone win ten thousand francs—mebbe mo'."

V

At the Bassens Docks across the river from Bordeaux the cargo ships from overseas discharged their various stuffs of war under the urge of the Wildcat and his fellows. Watching the dock crews at their work, day and night,

there lingered groups of spectators, American, English, French, Chinese, Anamites and Africans. Of this last group part were the boom-a-loom warriors of the Congo who had followed the Wildcat to St. Sulpice in response to his lure of government grub and tobacco. And presently for young lang syne, nicotine, calories, curiosity or lack of something else to do, the tribal brothers of Pala Dikoa and Libenga Zongo mingled with the Wildcat's crews along the route of the discharging cargo from the depths of the ship's holds to the loading tracks on the landward side of the warehouses on the docks. "Food and tobacco for a little work," reasoned the boom-a-loom group. "Extra han's so us boys kin lay roun' in ol' boat's cellar an' sleep some—sho' does help," the Wildcat figgered.

And the cold figures that reached the desk of the general commanding Base Section No. 2, A. E. F., showed that the Fust Service Battalion was unloading more tons of cargo per man than any other organization so employed in that contest which had been termed the "Race to Berlin." For the moment the Race

to Berlin was the African race and the Wildcat's crew was setting the pace.

Then very suddenly Lady Luck smiled at the Wildcat. "Get me some furlong nigger's clo'es f'r a day, Wildcat, an' yo' gits five francs f'm me." A blue-pass member of the Wildcat's crew, Bordeaux bound for a day's projectin' roun', aimed to camouflage hisself so as not to excite the malignant eyes of any club-swinging M. P. who might stand between a thirty-day thirst and the relievin' ruckus juice.

"Whah at is de five francs?" the Wildcat questioned.

The five francs changed hands and the Bordeaux bound boy of the Fust Service Battalion changed uniforms with Bonga Taro. Following the success of the tourists day in Bordeaux there resulted a steady exchange in disguises. The Wildcat profited heavily in his traffic in costumes and counted an increasing sheaf of five franc bills. Presently he touched the mark that made the payment for his two tailored uniforms a triflin' matter of a trip to the tailor's shop across the river in Bo'deaux.

CHAPTER VIII

I

On Saturday afternoon with less than a thousand tons of freight remaining in the hold of the steamship "Princess Clan" the Wildcat asked for and received a pass for Sunday in Bordeaux. He rounded up his colleague in crime, Cinnamon, and dispatched that privileged individual to the tailor shop for the waiting uniforms. By six o'clock the boy returned and half an hour later the Wildcat stepped out of his barrack arrayed in the trim perfection that comes with pride and proud raiment.

Then his captain sent for him. The Wildcat walked toward the Company Headquarters, feeling somehow that his luck had flopped again. Apprehensive of some new deal from misfortune's stacked deck, he confronted his captain. With the captain was a serious looking officer. "How come dis tin chicken colonel pesterin' roun'!" the Wildcat wondered. At attention he saluted: "Sir, Sergeant Vitus Marsden repo'ts to Cap'n."

The Captain regarded him gravely. The tin chicken colonel addressed the Wildcat. "Sergeant, for excellence in execution of duty and for the general efficiency which you and your associates have displayed the inspectors have confined their compliments to your crew and yourself, and have awarded you one thousand francs from the prize fund and ten days' exemption from duty beginning September first. That's all."

The Wildcat saluted and left. His head whirled with the severity of his sentence. "Execution—inspectors—thousand francs—ten days." He had known other court-martial business and the incidental tribulation which had inevitably followed departure from the straight and narrow path of military virtue.

Presently the stress of his guilt resolved itself into action. He sought the Special Representer. "Honey Tone—come out an' cheer up us boys downstairs in de ship's cellar. Us needs it."

Honey Tone accompanied the Wildcat to the ship.

The pair descended into the depths of the

forward cargo hold in which a gang of a hundred men were at work.

The Wildcat turned to Honey Tone. "Cheer up dis outfit whilst I rounds up de detail what relieves 'em. I'se goin' away f'r a few minnits, an' when I gets back us'll take a r'ar at de cube game." He disappeared up the ladder into the darkness which framed the hatch combing. Once on deck he made his way ashore to the barracks of his company. Silently, for it was after taps, he sought the bunk of the Backslid Baptis'. He quietly awakened that individual.

"Come outside," he whispered. The pair stood for a moment outside the door of the barracks. "Backslid," the Wildcat said, "gimme dem miss-out dice f'r half an hour. I jes' meet a rich boy on a boat an' I aims fo' a cleanin'. You gits half whut I makes." The Backslid one fished a pair of dice from his left sock and passed them over.

II

The Wildcat started toward the ship. Under the arc lights that lined the warehouse

tracks on the dock he paused to issue an order to a black boy whose only business up to that moment seemed to have been that of leaning against a warehouse. "Lizard, to-night all us boys on ol' boat lays off to rest up. Round up all de boom-a-loom niggers an' bring 'em to me. I'll be waitin' in de cellar do' of de boat —at de front end. After you an' de boom-a-looms comes you sticks close to me. Mebbe us'll go to Bo'deaux after midnight." Lizard faded into the darkness.

The Wildcat sought the waiting Special Representer in the hold of the ship. "Midnight gang comes on soon, Honey Tone,—le's you an' me have a r'ar at de cubes whilst we's waitin'. Shoots ten francs."

The Wildcat's luck seemed to have suddenly changed. By the time the boom-a-loom gang arrived he had accumulated a substantial fraction of the Special Representer's roll. Presently, as the last few tons of cargo were being shifted to position under the slings that swung from the cranes above the ship the Wildcat made a final pass. "Nach-ral. . . . Whuf!—an' dat cleans you! Honey Tone, luck sho' is crazy, some nights. Wait here 'til me an' Liz-

ard gets back, an' us'll 'sorb a few drams o' ruckus juice. Lizard knows where at to get it late at night. You needs revivin'."

The Special Representer, having seen the last of his francs melt away under the heat of Backslid's dice, sat inert,—overcome with the suddenness of his financial finish.

The Wildcat and Lizard climbed out of the forward hold as the last slingload of cargo went aloft into the darkness. At the first hatch on Number Three deck, ten feet below the waterline, the pair paused for a few moments. Under the Wildcat's direction they heaved at the hatch covers and presently Honey Tone and the hundred boom-a-loom niggers were securely confined under the steel and oak of the hatch covers and their battens.

"They gits out th'oo a bulkhead do', Lizard. When yo' finishes anythin' finish complete," the Wildcat advised. That there was no means of exit through a bulkhead door he did not feel constrained to explain to the passive and incurious Lizard.

On deck, the Wildcat sought the watch officer of the "Princess Clan." "Cap'n," he said, "all de freight's h'isted outen de front end an' ev'-

thing's policed up neat an' clean." With the Lizard at his heels he went ashore. "'Princess Clan,'" he muttered as he went over the side, "'Princess Clan,' on yo' way an' good luck, Lady." He and the Lizard walked softly in the direction of their barracks. The Wildcat yawned once or twice, widely. The Lizard yawned twice as wide. "Boy," the Wildcat said, "us is plum tired—Bo'deaux to-morr', mebbe—but not to-night." The Lizard went to bed.

The Wildcat softly awakened the Backslid Baptis' for the second time that night. "Here's de baby gallopers," he said as he returned the miss-out dice to the Backslid one, "an' here's yo' half de money." True to his word the Wildcat handed over a great ball of banknotes. "Dey sho' is rollin' high f'r me an' Lady Luck. Backslid, I bids yo' good-night."

III

About the time the Wildcat started toward Bordeaux, away from the inspectors and the ten days and the execution that the tin chicken colonel had mentioned, the "Princess Clan" let

go her lines and cleared on the tide down river for Paulliac, the Lannick Ocean and a home port in the U. S. A.

In her forward hold Honey Tone and the hundred boom-a-looms were seeing things in the dark and milling strong.

IV

The Wildcat's fear grew as he walked toward the freedom of Bordeaux. He perspired with relief as the sentry at the stone bridge read his pass and waved him a clearance, but this relief endured only for the moment. Before he had been in the town half an hour his cumulative unreasoning fear had inspired a wild desire to move along.

"Ah got money—money, me an' yo' travels 'til both of us gits wore out."

The rumble of a passing truck leaving the Allees de Tourny attracted him. He swung aboard and when the driver put over a verbal barrage he countered with a fifty franc note. "Ah's got to repo't befo' mawnin'," he explained.

"Where at?" the driver questioned.

"Wha' you's headed fo'?"

"Paulliac."

"Dat's de town."

Into the darkness, along the Paulliac road the Wildcat traveled on his rumbling way, while farther to the East the "Princess Clan" threaded the channel of the Gironde.

At Paulliac the Wildcat established himself with the guard at the naval station. The masthead lights of a ship laying at the dock showed above the blanket of fog which lay upon the land.

"Where at is dat ship headed fo'?" the Wildcat questioned.

"Soon as she gets her fresh water tanks filled she clears for New Orleans," the guard replied.

New Orleans—the Mississip'! Sunshine and the scenes of the fair untroubled days before the pestering war had broken in upon the tranquil course of a boy's life! The Wildcat read his immediate future. "Boy—le's go!" He counted out a deck of banknotes and held them ready as he climbed over the side of the ship. The watch hailed him . . . but presently he was lying snugly in the lee of a winch on the

forward deck, under a paulin which was to stay in place until the hoisting gear would function again in the distant homeland port.

At dawn the ship cleared and steamed against the incoming tide toward the open sea. The Wildcat, free and confident, poked his head from under cover and looked around. Suddenly he extended his neck full length like a hardshell turtle. On the bridge of the ship there stood an officer whom he knew—an officer of the "Princess Clan."

He crawled out of his retreat and spoke to a sailor. "Boy," he asked, "whut's dis boat's name?"

The sailor looked at him queerly for a moment. "You ought to know,—you been workin' on her two weeks at the Bassens Dock. She's still the 'Princess Clan.' "

A mile downstream the Wildcat eased over the side and down a trailing line. He dragged in the rush of water for a minute and let go. He swam for the shore half a mile away and dragged himself into the willows that lined the bank. For an hour he lay in the sun drying his clothes and figgerin' how come Lady Luck to fool a boy so much. "When ol' Honey Tone

an' them boom-a-looms is let out—did they find me I'd sho' be landed on de blood hook."

Pretty soon he started toward a farmhouse a mile away. "Git me some eggs an' bread an' a r'ar of ol' Van Blank."

At the house he landed square in the clutch of a roving M. P. whose special duty was the rounding up of ramblers.

"That pass says Bordeaux. Beat it that way and beat it quick. There's a truck leaving in ten minutes from the Naval Station and I'll see you on board of that,—or in the guardhouse. I'd ought to kill you now, but the war needs you."

Before noon, in the brilliant sunlight of an active Sunday the Wildcat was back in Bordeaux. The truck stopped in front of the Bordeaux Café to permit a couple of thirsty officers to descend. The Wildcat figured that he would better unload at this point than at the more thickly populated area around the Tourny "Y."

As he climbed down from the truck a voice nailed him in his coffin. "Wildcat, come here!" From in front of the Café Bordeaux

the Wildcat's captain summoned the wanderer.

"Cap'n, yessuh!"

"Bring that package and follow me," the Captain ordered. "We're going back to camp."

The captured Wildcat dragged along at his captain's heels to their camp across the river.

"Cap'n, when does they lock me up?"

"I'm going to preach at your grave after they shoot you." The Captain spoke seriously but not with sincerity. Nevertheless the verdict fitted the Wildcat's mottled conscience so exactly that its effect was marked by violence. By the time the pair reached camp the Wildcat was mentally shipping his own remains C. O. D. to his next of kin.

"Bring that package into the office," the Captain directed. The Wildcat followed into the orderly room of the company. The Captain seated himself at his desk and reached for a letter that lay upon it. Pinned to the letter was a narrower slip of pink paper.

"Papeh had words wrote on it," the Wildcat later explained to Cinnamon. "Ol' Cap'n says, 'Wilecat, you boys beat de res' unloadin' freight off de "Princess Clan" in dis Race to Berlin.

Yo' gits a thousand francs an' ten days' vacation f'm de commandin' gin'ral.'"

"Then whut yo' say, Wilecat?"

"I sez, 'Cap'n, yessuh.'"

"Boy—hot damn! Lady Luck sho' is smilin' dis mawnin'."

The Wildcat's face was suddenly quiet.

"Whut yo' thinkin'?" Cinnamon asked.

"Me? The Wildcat hesitated. "I was ponderin' 'bout ol' Honey Tone. Wondeh how much upliftin' kin he do wid dem boom-a-loom niggers 'twixt heah an' N'O'leans. . . . Lady Luck—at yo' feet!"

CHAPTER IX

I

"Phœbe wuz a feeble baby bee,
Phœbe maybe sting you
Like she done stung me."

An emergency call for more tracks in the St. Sulpice terminals resulted in a sudden demand for the brunet track-building experts of the Fust Service Battalion. The Wildcat and his associates were presently back in their old camp and glad to be free of the arduous loafing business in the cellars of ships at the Bassens Docks.

"How come you niggers can't keep step past de office when Cap'n looks out de do'?" The Wildcat preached at his gang on the way to work in the railroad yards.

"When I columns you lef', you heads fo' de work an' not to'a'ds de kitchen. Column—lef'! Lef', I says! Lef'! Head dat squad roun', co'p'al! Follow dat mascot!"

The Wildcat's platoon scattered to the four winds of France. "Rally roun' Lily—rally roun' dat mascot goat!"

After five minutes' work the Wildcat accumulated his platoon and headed them towards the scene of the day's work. "Wuz sweat worth a nickel a quart, today you niggers makes fo' bits apiece. Ah neveh seed such a slew-foot triflin' outfit. Follow dat mascot—dat's all I tells you!"

"Sergeant, I'se lame. Kin I route step some?"

"Lemme see yo' laig—is you lyin' Ah'll lame you!"

"Kaint see is I—iodine whut de doctor paints me wif don't show. I tells yo' I'se same as a cripple."

"'Ceptin' in de appetite. Ah seed you at brekfus'—wuz po'k chops swellin' you couldn't git into a box car."

The marching platoon passed a detail of German prisoners carrying railroad ties. "Rustle dem ties white boys!" the Wildcat called. "How is us gwine to win dis wah if you-all don't he'p us?"

"Phœbe wuz a fliah,
Come f'm Ten-o-see.
Phœbe lit a fiah
Where she lit on me."

"Wisht I wuz in Ten-o-see 'stid of in dis wah! Wisht I wuz in heaven."

"Only way you'll git to heaven is wuz heaven a jail an' some white man knowed you like I does."

"Neveh seed such a lastin' job—wondeh when de end of de wah'll be, Wildcat?"

"Front end done been—hind end'll come when ol' Republicans starts winnin'."

"Some Democrats is all right—Cap'n's a Democrat."

"How come you-all knows so much 'bout Cap'n?"

"I knows. I seed him walk home f'm de banquet 'thout no he'p—rest o' de officers had to be carried. Lootenant's a Republican—had to wateh him an' bed him down like a mule. Cap'n sho' is Democrat—he's outdrunk ev'y officeh what showed up so fah."

"Cap'n sho' kin ca'y his gin ration—sho' kin ca'y a load."

"I'll say he kin—he may be old but he's got kid gloves."

"Detail . . . 'tenshun! Detail . . . halt! Scatteh out an' see kin yo' earn yo' rations.

Tie dat mascot in de vineyard an' leave him eat grapevines."

"Betteh tie him to de track an' see kin a train kill him. He et two pairs of shoes an' de linin' out of a ovehcoat yistiddy. Neveh seed such a goat f'r raiment lunch. Wuz he attached to ol' supply sahgent f'r rations he'd figgeh he'd landed in heaven!"

The platoon strung out along the track and languidly began the day's work.

The Wildcat figgered a little rest would help him some. He called to a waterboy. "Roust me out afteh I'se laid a couple hours." He coiled himself up in the shade of a pile of lumber and was asleep before his head hit the ground.

No sooner was the Wildcat asleep than several members of his crew gravitated about a push car which stood beside the track. In the group were Cube and the Backslid Baptis', DeWitt Massey, The Lizard, Moon Eye, and half a dozen more domino gallopers.

"Shoots a franc," the Backslid one announced.

"Lemme see de dice—I knows you, Baptis'."

"Seven . . . li'l lady love . . . Whoof!"

The Wildcat moved uneasily in his sleep.

"Ace an' a dooce—loses nuthin' but yo' money, Moon Eye. Roll 'em!"

The Wildcat sat straight up. In four seconds he had elbowed himself into action. "Gimme dem dice! Gimme dem dice! Shoots ten francs . . . Whuf! Five an' fo' is nine . . . an' a six-tray. Lay dead. Shoots twenty . . . fade me is you reckless . . . Mawnin' seven—I lets it lay. Shoots forty . . . Lady Luck, I aims to run yo' ragged. Fade me field han's, fade me! Money, rally roun'! Wham! . . . two top sides says 'leven!"

"'Ten-shun!"

The Captain, fifty feet away, gazed calmly at the group.

"Wildcat, come here!"

"Cap'n, yessuh! Me an' dese boys wuz jes' waitin' fo'——"

"You won't have long to wait for what's coming to you. Come back to camp with me. Rest of you boys get to work."

The Captain's voice was singin' low like a boiler just before she busts. The Wildcat began to worry about himself. "Cap'n, suh, whut is it whut's comin' to me—I'se——"

"Shut up before I knock you loose from your ears!"

"Cap'n, yessuh!"

Black clouds obscured the four quadrants of the Wildcat's horizon. "Cap'n's foamin' agin. Lady Luck, whah at is you hid?"

Followed by the drooping Wildcat, the Captain entered the battalion office and made his way to a smaller room partitioned off in one corner of it.

"Come in here!"

"Cap'n, yessuh."

Five minutes later the Wildcat dragged his remains to his quarters and put himself to bed. "Wuz they one stick o' stovewood wif my name wrote on it, Cap'n sho' foun' it."

Cinnamon, the Captain's striker, a brunet New Orleans boy, drifted in with his guitar. "Wilecat, you likes music—nex' time Cap'n gits th'oo 'ith you I'll play at yo' funeral."

"Boy, snatch me Memphis Blues. Ol' Cap'n ain't hurt me—'ceptin' I bust my voice yellin' so's he'd think so."

II

Having accomplished the first success in a series of battles with the triflin' Wildcat, the Captain proceeded to frame an elaborate series of charges which his clerk incorporated in a court-martial. "What date do you wish to have him up?" the clerk asked.

"Right now—this minute—as soon as I can sign my name. I'll break that nigger of shootin' craps in public or kill him. Send an orderly after him and we'll have his trial now."

Cinnamon, who had drifted to the office, was dispatched after the Wildcat. "Cap'n says burn yo' shoe. He's waitin' fo' you in his office."

"Hope he ain't foun' no more stovewood—neveh seed such a heavy club."

Cinnamon laughed derisively. "I bet we gits a holiday to-morr'—an' a band an' marchin' an'——"

"How come?"

"Funeral p'cession, Wildcat—us marches slow an' you leads."

"Boy, you makes me sick." The Wildcat started for his doom.

"Fo' long you gits some flowehs readin' 'Rest from now on.' "

The court-martial was fast business. "Guardhouse for three months, forfeits three months' pay, reduced from grade of sergeant to private, effective to-day."

The Wildcat dragged himself over to report to the Sergeant of the Guard. "Cap'n sho' learned to speak his piece by heart."

The Wildcat, languishing in the guardhouse, rapidly established himself in the mixed company therein. Before he had been within its walls an hour he had become the financial center of his little world. Prisoners are not supposed to have money with them but under the surface discipline the army is an informal aggregate of fractured rules and busted regulations, known and overlooked by the governmentalities who wear the stars and varnished boots of rank.

Pretty soon the Wildcat became a medium good languisher. The guardhouse was humid and warm and except for three or four hours' work around camp each day the prisoners had nothing to do but eat and sleep and gamble.

Cinnamon, observing this, came to envy his associate.

"Cap'n has me draggin' roun' f'm sun-up to when de owls hoot," he complained. "Wisht I could git me th'ee months in jail whah at ol' Wilecat is."

He analyzed the process by means of which the Wildcat had accomplished his nominal punishment. "Me—I'se neveh knowed Lady Luck to fail me," he announced blandly one evening after supper. "Gimme dem dice. "C'm out heah whah I kin roll 'em wild." He selected an area of high visibility in front of the barracks and talked loud. "Shoots five francs. . . ."

The Cap'n responded under forced draft. He suddenly appeared in front of Cinnamon. "Boy," he said to his striker, "at nine o'clock to-night maybe I'll kill you. Report over to the guardhouse under arrest."

The thankful Cinnamon picked up his five francs. "Cap'n, yessuh," he said. He walked rapidly to the sentry outside of the guardhouse. "Cap'n of us boys Fust Service Battalion ordehs me repo't heah under arrest."

"Corporal th' guard!" the sentry bawled.

"Git inside, boy, before I shove this gun through you."

"How come you heah?" the Wildcat asked in greeting.

"Me—Wilecat, I has me a drag avec ol' Lady Luck, ness pa!"

"Us sho' is rollin' strong, Cin'mun! Me—I stays heah goin' on 'leven weeks mo'. Ol' wah ain't so bad dis way. Wisht I could stay heah f'm now on. Us kin——"

"Vitus Marsden!" The Wildcat heard his name called by the sergeant of the guard who stood in the doorway of the enclosure.

"Dat's me." The Wildcat stepped importantly towards the source of the summons.

"Report at once on parole for duty as personal orderly for the Captain of the First Service Battalion."

"Cinnamon, doggone you, heah you is—an' I'se persecuted with yo' job draggin' roun' mawnin' an' night fo' ol' Cap'n Jack. Lady Luck, wuz you a rabbit, I'd gallop you to death!"

CHAPTER X

I

The A. E. F. was long, theoretically, on moral and physical cleanliness. On Sunday evening the Wildcat was exposed to forty minutes' preaching, under orders.

"Lootenant preacheh 'spounded 'bout a boy he called Mis' P'odigal's son," he later explained to Cinnamon. "Sho' wuz plum dead f'm his collar o'naments up. Boy et shucks an' fed all de cawn to some hawgs. Me—I'd et me a cawn pone an' could I get me a Barlow, I'd butcher me a hawg and have me some po'k chops an' side meat an' ham an' spah ribs an' gravy an' chittlin's an' mebbe some mo' ham —Wondeh what time dinneh'll be ready."

"Mebbe them hawgs wuz penned up neah a house—an' watched close. Ol' constable calls it stealin' is you ketched."

"Ain't been yit—an' I craves not to be. Hawgs don't care who owns 'em—killin' day boun' to ketch 'em anyhow, come Thanksgivin' time."

A messenger interrupted the conversation. "Wilecat, Cap'n says whah in hell is you."

The Wildcat adapted his pace to the tenor of the summons.

"Cap'n—whut wuz it, suh? I wuz hangin' yo' light unifohm on de line an'——"

"Tell Cinnamon to report to the cook for K. P. duty," the Captain said. "Give the sergeant at the guardhouse this paper."

The Wildcat carried the glad tidings. "Yo' gits fo'teen hours a day roun' de kitchen. "I'se et worse'n I has lately, but I depen's heavy on you, Cinnamon—'long as you an' me is frien's an' you is he'pin' in de kitchen. Mos' all de time I'se hungry."

"Boy, we eats heavy, ness pa?"

"Sho' do—how come you sez 'ness pa' all de time?"

"Ness pa is French fo' sayin' wuz Lady Luck a bird, us has a handful of tail feathers."

II

In Washington, behind an elaborate mahogany bulwark, a quartermaster colonel calculated an intricate soap problem affecting the

epidermis of several million men. "Ultimate strength of three million in the Zone of Advance, Watkins—put down three million—multiplied by the number of days in two years. Say three million by seven hundred. What does that give you?"

"Twenty-one hundred million."

"Very good. Say they use an ounce of soap a day—more than that up there where the—ah—insects are thickest, means twenty-one hundred million ounces. Get out a requisition covering that at once. Liquid soap—twenty-one hundred million ounces of liquid soap to be shipped immediately to the Commander-in-Chief, A. E. F.—Hoboken to Bordeaux for distribution from the St. Sulpice Storage Depot."

"Yessir." Watkins sought his own refuge and began winding the red tape around the soap. He discovered that the liquid soap order amounted to over sixty-five thousand tons of material without considering containers.

"Ten shiploads—sure is a big war."

And on a morning when everybody from the front line to the base ports in France went hungry at breakfast time because the subs had sunk a dozen shiploads of food, the first four

cargoes of liquid soap sailed from an Atlantic port bound for somewhere in France where the cooties grew wild.

An order issued from G. H. Q. covering the theory that cleanliness is next to loaning money to the sentry at the pearly gates. "Daily bath, hell!" commented the A. E. F. "If I had water enough for a bath, I'd drink it."

III

At St. Sulpice open storage spaces and warehouses rapidly filled with steel drums full of liquid soap. The Fust Service Battalion, detailed to unload the trains arriving from the docks near Bordeaux, sweated and heaved and grunted day after day at its endless task. "How come so much soap?" Moon Eye complained. "Neveh seed so much soap. Wuz it sorghum sweetenin', they might be some sense to it. Us needs soap 'bout like a cootie needs wings." Moon Eye scratched himself and swung onto another barrel of soap.

Over at the Captain's quarters the Wildcat was busy straightening up the site of a poker battle which had waged throughout the night.

Close in his wake followed the goat, Lily, nominally mascot of the Battalion, but in reality the personal protégé of the Wildcat. Lily, munching contentedly on the nine of clubs and a shredded face card, gave forth a plaintive bleat.

"Shut up—no wondeh your insides hurts. When you eats th'ee socks an' two cigahs an' half a deck of cyards yo' has yo' mis'ry comin'. Leggo 'at papeh!"

The Wildcat finished his work and proceeded to the Battalion office adjoining the Captain's quarters. The room was untenanted at the moment, and while the Wildcat swept the litter which lay about, into the dark corners of the room where it might accumulate unnoticed, Lily grazed here and there at will.

"Neveh seed such a ol' goat f'r eatin' cigahs. Lay off 'at long one—I aims to smoke 'at cigah myse'f afteh me an Cinnamon eats us a li'l snack." The Wildcat stowed the half smoked cigar in the left pocket of his shirt and made his way to the kitchen, leaving Lily safely confined behind closed doors. "Stay theh an' walk yo' post whilst I 'cumulates some rations."

Lily walked a staggering post for a few min-

utes until a neatly cultivated garden of Service records attracted her attention. In the midst of the alphabet she found a menu to her taste. She browsed lightly on the documentary evidence covering the military biography of Moon Eye and the Backslid Baptist. Of Vitus Marsden, the Wildcat, she ate all but the two wire staples which bound his folio. She gorged on Cinnamon, Lizard and young Cube Calvin. From the Captain's desk she partook of a cellulose dessert consisting of the courtmartial charge sheets of the Wildcat and Cinnamon, covering the crime of being publicly discovered shootin' craps. She drank lightly of crimson wine from an inkwell and found it not pleasing to her taste. "Blaa!"

"Lily, you debbil, come off dat desk." The Wildcat, returning to the office, accumulated the mascot. "Wuz cyclones hawns and hair, you is six. Ah'll 'Blaa' you wid a chair in a minnit."

The Wildcat straightened out the remaining disordered documents and dragged Lily to an area back of the Captain's quarters. "Roam heah an' see kin you eat ground."

He tied the mascot securely and began look-

ing over the Captain's socks. "See kin I find ol' socks big enough to fit me. Sho' need me some socks to-morr' when I gits Cap'n's unifawm in Bo'deaux f'm 'at tailor man."

IV

An urgent demand for gasoline for the Motor Transport Corps in the Zone of Advance sang along the midnight wires.

"We have five cargoes of gasoline, but have no containers," answered the general commanding Base Section No. 2. He rang for his adjutant. "Rush this wire to G. H. Q.—no containers for gasoline."

The adjutant, an exceptional colonel who was not all bone above his collar ornaments, read the message which the general handed him.

"Why not ship some gas in those steel drums that the damned liquid soap came in?" he suggested. "The carpenter force at St. Sulpice could build a wood tank overnight big enough to hold two or three shiploads of that deleted soap—and we could ship the gasoline in the empty drums."

"Great work! Excellent idea!" the general approved. "Issue orders at once. That's what I call efficiency. Won't forget that. Rush it."

An order issued twenty minutes later over the telephone to St. Sulpice to construct a wood reservoir five hundred feet long, two hundred feet wide and ten feet deep; and to empty the drums of liquid soap into this reservoir. "Ship empty drums to gasoline reserve depot Sursol Docks. Rush."

At midnight six thousand men were at work on the huge wood tank and by nine o'clock the next day it was half filled with the liquid soap.

The spur tracks leading to the great tank near the river were filled with carloads of empty drums bound for the Gasoline Reserve Depot.

"Compliment you on the expedient," wired G. H. Q. to the general commanding Base 2. The general forgot that the idea originated with his adjutant.

Meanwhile the ponderous tank of soap grew warm in the afternoon sun and cooled in the frosts of evening.

V

At evening the Captain of the Fust Service Battalion came to his quarters. The Wildcat was teaching the mascot goat, Lily, not to eat shoes.

"Boy, build me a fire and build it quick." The Captain was cold.

"Cap'n, yessuh." The Wildcat began tying a complicated twist in Lily's picket rope which he hoped might endure until his return.

The Captain began opening his mail. In the first envelope was a bill from a Bordeaux tailor. In the second was a request from a brother officer in Paris for the loan of twelve hundred francs. In the third was a notification from Washington stating that the Captain had been overpaid seventy-three dollars on his last pay voucher, and that refund must be made at once.

All this finance bounced back and hit the Wildcat. "Are you going to build that fire before I kill you or afterwards?" The Captain moved easily toward the Wildcat.

Lily and the confining knot were suddenly abandoned. "Cap'n, they ain't no chunk wood

heah—nothin' 'ceptin' kin'lins—I'se gwine fo' some right now."

The Wildcat trotted out of the door, one eye open for firewood, and the other looking into the dismal future that promised to be his unless the Cap'n's mood changed mighty sudden. Under a carwheel, over the spur track leading to the tank of liquid soap, the Wildcat saw a nice piece of two by four. "Dry wood—sho' burn noble." He kicked the two by four from where it was wedged under the carwheel. A car length ahead he saw another similar block which he retrieved. "Three is plenty fo' a start." He kicked the third block loose and started towards the office with it. He had gone only a little way when a noise behind him attracted his attention. He turned and discovered that the string of cars from under which he had removed the blocks, was in motion. "Sho' kin roll easy down hill."

He looked about him. "Mebbe dese heah blocks wuz all de brakes ol' cars had. Mebbe I'se instigated a ruckus. Hope nobody seed me an' tells Cap'n."

The Wildcat's second mebbe suffered a rapid transition into reality. Hornet railroaders be-

gan pouring towards the racing train. Each man ran a little way and then stood gazing breathlessly at the rattling tornado headed for the soap tank a mile down hill. . . .

The chill rain of evening began to fall as the Wildcat lighted the Captain's fire. In the Captain's fifth envelope was an invitation from the artillery gang at Souge to sit in the following night at a five card enterprise where a gentleman bets that something he doesn't hold outranks the hand some other gentleman is inflicted with.

"Soon as you get that fire built, head for Bordeaux on the six-twenty and get my new uniform from Mesuret's tailor shop on the Rue Intendence. Here's your pass."

"Cap'n, yessuh." The Wildcat breathed heavy. Here, delivered into his hands, was a quick evasion of the heavy swinging club with which Lady Luck was about to caress him.

From the distance there came the echo of a terrific crash. For five seconds there followed a heavy sustained roar. The Captain suddenly abandoned his correspondence. "What the hell broke loose?"

"Speck ol' sergeant's blowed up some

stumps mebbe. Cap'n, suh—mebbe ol' thundeh sto'm bust—mebbe——"

The Captain had joined in the race towards the side of the soap tank where twelve heavy freight cars had plowed through a fabric of splintering timber. When he arrived near the scene the sloping terrain from the tank to the river was ten feet deep in a dancing foam created by the impact of a myriad raindrops mingling with the liquid soap. On the choppy surface of the Gironde there presently foamed enough soapsuds to last a million Mondays.

CHAPTER XI

I

At evening the Wildcat leading the mascot goat, Lily, entered Bordeaux via the stone bridge that spans the Gironde. The smothery soap-suds blanket was rolling up the river and spreading into the city streets.

An automobile ran into a great bank of foam and died. The driver and his passenger raced on foot from out of the menace of the translucent mass of bubbles.

The Wildcat, observing the bubble phenomena, headed for the tailor shop. He paused a moment to absorb a few slugs of cognac. The goat, Lily, which he led beside him, gave a plaintive bleat. "Is you a mascot, you'd betteh begin workin' at it heavy, Lily. Us needs to ketch up now wif Lady Luck—else we'se gwine neveh to see 'at woman again."

The Wildcat noticed that the twinkling lights that lined the Intendence revealed a stream of humanity headed in one direction only—away from the river.

At the door of the tailor shop an M. P. hailed the Wildcat. "Boy, halt! What are you doing in town this time of night?"

The Wildcat's heart got up on a trapeze and tried a tail spin. Here was the hand of the Law—a heavy hand closely followed by the Law's foot clad in the new and heavy marching shoe.

"Me—nuthin'. I never knowed dat ol' railroad train'd run away 'count of a li'l stick o' wood bein'——"

The M. P. decided the Wildcat had missed his train. "Old stuff! Can th' bunk! Lemme see your pass."

The Wildcat explored his raiment and finally produced the slip of paper which spelled temporary freedom. "I'se gwine back—me and Lily, soon as I 'cumulates Cap'n's uniform f'm ol' tailor man in the sto' right heah."

"Beat it then—and lay off the coonyak." The M. P. read the pass and gave the Wildcat a little parting advice.

The Wildcat entered the tailor shop five minutes before closing time. A hare-lipped young clerk struggling with a .22 cal. English vocabulary, discovered the motive of the Wildcat's

visit and returned presently with a bundle in which an officer's uniform was neatly folded.

"Eet is charged, M'sieur nagur. Voilà! 'Revoir."

The Wildcat plus the goat, Lily, entered into the night. "Tell us, 'Wallow in de riveh!' Never seed white boys sassy like dese heah French frogs is."

The Wildcat started towards the river on his journey home. And then, quite suddenly, he and Lily reversed their line of march and headed up the street. Approaching them in gentle jumps of a hundred feet was a wall of soap bubbles fifty feet high. "Neveh seed such heavy drams o' coon-yak. Us sho' is had plenty, an' then some. Lily, you mascot, see kin yo' laigs rattle a gallop. Git out o' town. Le's go!"

At the distant crescent Avenue which lay about the city the Wildcat paused long enough to take on four more slugs of cognac. The paper covering about the uniform, soggy in the rain, burst when it lay between the Wildcat's feet. He picked it up and started out of the café with it. Through the opening in the package, the brilliant scarlet of French cav-

alry breeches assaulted the Wildcat's heavy eyes. "Lily, us travels! I'se stahted seein' red! Sho' is a bad sign!"

In the obscurity of the great trees which fringed the boulevard the Wildcat completed his investigation of the package. "Eyes tol' me true. Ol' pants sho' is red. Dese is clo'es like French Cap'ns weahs."

From down the street there came the measured beat of the nine o'clock guard relief. "Cap'n kill me sho', does I go back. Ol' M. P. jail me does he ketch me in Bo'deaux. Me—I fades out."

The Wildcat emerged from the total eclipse of a wide spreading tree five minutes later wearing the French uniform, but instead of the bars of a Captain's rank on his sleeves there gleamed the polished stars of a general of the line. On the Wildcat's head was a cap encircled by two wreaths of golden leaves.

"Lily—you follows me. I sho' aims not to lead you—me totin' all dis rank."

In the rays of a street lamp the Wildcat strutted past his first M. P. That young soldier focused his eyes carefully on the glitter-

ing insignia and then rendered a strenuous salute.

"First nigger general I ever saw. These frogs sure beat hell."

The next M. P. which the Wildcat passed came from another part of the United States. He did the best he could to express his sentiments in profane language, neither appropriate nor available for present use. Then he swung his club savagely in the darkness at an imaginary adversary.

II

Meanwhile the Gironde River, the Wildcat's captain and a twin star general of the A. E. F. were each and severally foaming at the mouth.

General Bore, a party to a session of refined military poker, played his game wisely during the early part of the evening, and then fully alcoholized, played not too well. At midnight the members of the party one by one departed through the rain in their respective official conveyances. The general lingered for a final drink at the urgent invitation of his host.

Just then the general's car was laying aban-

doned in a bank of soap bubbles beside a residence near the river in which the general's chauffeur had discovered a practically flawless feminine pearl. "No carburetor on earth can mix soapsuds and gas so it'll explode, mon cherie. T'ell with th' old bird. Leave him walk home—or fly if his boots is too tight. Drag out another one of them vang blinks whilst I tells you about life in San Francisco."

An hour after midnight, the general sailed grandly down the street through the rain. Over the shoal places in the sidewalk he backed and filled to steerage way, came about smartly, luffed from the menace of a tree and tacked to the smooth residential cliffs that lined his channel. Softly, at times, he sang: "Shine on, you doggone silv'ry—hic! G'wan, baby. Shine some f'r the love of—hic! Never saw a blacker night. Rain on, gentle rainlets. How dry I yam—How driyam—Likell I yam. I should—hic!—worry!"

A soldier of the A. E. F. approached. The general stiffened during the second of proximity and snapped a return to the M. P.'s salute.

"Not a globe busted and the dynamo goin'

a million—lit up like a dimun' palace—an' him wearin' two stars!" The M. P. did some heavy thinking as he walked his post.

III

Pulsing through the night toward a secret base for subs, the wireless from Berlin hissed an order to the Herr Lieutenant von Stutz. "To the Gironde approaches from America a convoy of twelve food ships, six ammunition cargoes, four with troops. Protection six sub-chasers. Sink the food ships first."

Eight minutes after the radio had reached the commander's hands, four undersea boats were driving through a choppy sea toward the mouth of the Gironde. At five o'clock in the morning the four submarines lay, decks awash, off the mouth of that river.

Steaming toward their certain fate, the wallowing hulls of the great convoy slushed through the phosphorescent sea.

IV

The Wildcat, in his French general's uniform, closely convoyed by Lily, the goat,

prowled through the mysterious darkness of Bordeaux. Approaching him over a heavy rolling sea, carrying a capacity cargo, sailed the twin-star general.

The enlarging blanket of soap bubbles fifty feet deep, bulged from its inexhaustible source in gentle but incessant hundred foot leaps.

Looming out of the night the two-star general saw the Wildcat. First the red breeches became visible, then the coat with its heavy insignia. In the wake of the figure General Bore saw a ghostly goat. The Wildcat's face blended so perfectly with the shadows that he appeared to be headless.

General Bore, fearing for an instant that he was beginning to see things, was reassured by the gleaming whites of the Wildcat's eyes.

The Wildcat saw the bedraggled general and laughed. His mouth, opening in a wide crescent, gave him the look of a man whose throat had been cut considerably more than the technique of throat cutting demands.

General Bore, still doubting his own reason, saluted the French uniform. "Bon sore, mon General."

"Cap'n, so is mine," the Wildcat replied

pleasantly. "Mah bones sho' is sore—dis rain likely. Mah feet is wuss."

General Bore looked puzzled. "Voo parley English?" he asked. He kicked sideways at the goat, Lily, to assure himself of the mascot's reality. His booted foot landed heavily on Lily's ribs.

"Lay off dat goat, man. Lily ain't done nuthin' to you."

Lily, however, made a sudden resolution. She backed off twenty feet and accumulated a few million slugs of momentum. She landed on General Bore south of his equatorial Sam Browne belt. General Bore landed somewhere in France.

The Wildcat grabbed the rope which trailed from the mascot's collar, and together they galloped into the gulf of night.

The general assembled himself and got to his feet, posing for a moment like an advertisement for a rheumatism cure. And then he also raced from the scene. Coming toward him was a great black wall which slithered as it moved. The wall glistened in spots like polished flint.

"Whiskey since I was twelve," he reflected, "but never another drop if I regain my reason."

The surging wall of bubbles engulfed him and his resolve. He began a wild peal of laughter which gurgled to silence in the blanket of bubbles. The general's eyes began to smart. Around him was absolute darkness. He stumbled over the curb and fell down heavily.

He had his boots on when he fell. "Never mind the guard," he muttered. "As you were! At—rest!" He fanned at the breaking bubbles once or twice like a seal wriggling its flippers, and then he fell asleep.

CHAPTER XII

I

At daybreak came the morning breezes and in half an hour the blanket of bubbles which lay over Bordeaux and the Gironde was no more.

The rainclouds retreated before the driving sunshine. In the early light the two-star general sat up on the curb. He got to his feet and started steadily for his residence. He recalled fragments of the nightmare. "That last drink sure raised hell—I'm getting old. Nigger with his throat cut—and a goat—and the Johnstown flood—I've got to cut it out."

II

The Wildcat walked boldly to a clothesline near a bathhouse at Beau Desert camp and appropriated therefrom an O. D. uniform. "Us looks too noble in dese heah red pants—'tracts folks too much. Lily, us fades sudden. Le's go."

III

The Herr-Lieutenant von Stutz dictated a radiogram to Berlin and ordered the return of his defeated submarine flotilla. "Under protection of a screen of bubbles formed by a new gas now being analyzed by our chemist the American ships eluded us and safely entered the Gironde."

IV

On the desk of the Commanding General of the Base lay two letters. One from G. H. Q. recited at length various valid reasons why the general should see fit to accept the Distinguished Service Medal. "For your initiative in governing the Base, and for the expedient which enabled our armies to maintain their Motor Transport service when no containers for gasoline were available, and most especially for the opportune invention of the bubble screen which undoubtedly saved many ships of our last convoy, the Distinguished Service Medal is awarded you. You will please name a date convenient to yourself on which troops

may be paraded at a ceremony during which medal and honors will be conferred."

The second letter contained a check on a New York bank. It was from Commander Tubby, U. S. N. "Our agents intercepted radiogram from sub flotilla to enemy headquarters indicating attempted attack upon convoy of food ships which recently entered Gironde safely under cover of bubble screen generated at St. Sulpice Storage Depot. The enclosure is from the officers and crews of twelve ships concerned, and will be awarded, at your discretion, to the individual directly responsible for creation of screen."

The General fixed the date for formally accepting the Distinguished Service Medal and wired his reply to the letter from G. H. Q. covering that subject.

He summoned his adjutant and issued an order for an investigation to discover the individual responsible for the creation of the soap bubble phenomena.

He sat down in his chair and lighted the cork end of a cigarette. "That's that. Sure glad that the flood wasn't a D. T. party. Sure had me guessing for awhile—never can tell

about those French drinks and the rotten whiskey you get over here."

V

As far as Lily was concerned, she was thriving a million on a gypsy's career, but on the fourth day of his wandering the Wildcat craved arrest and a fixed future which included rations and a warm place to sleep. "Bein' wild an' free is all right mebbe—but Ah likes mah rations reg'lah. Dis ramblin' business suits me 'bout like a bustin' headache suits a woodpeckeh. Us needs rations. When does us eat?"

A keen eyed M. P. solved the Wildcat's problem. "Lemme see your pass."

"Ain't got none—me an' dis mascot——"

"What outfit do you belong to?"

"Fust Service Battalion—out at St. Sulpice."

"C'm on. Casino f'r yours."

At the Casino de Lilas the Wildcat, penned up with a hundred other prisoners, ate heavily for the first time since he had left St. Sulpice.

"Rations sho' is noble!" he grunted. "How come I crazy enough to leave ol' Cinnamon an'

de kitchen stove. Kaint no mo'n kill a boy no how, an' 'at beats starvin'."

"Keep him," the Wildcat's captain telephoned in reply to advices concerning his prodigal's capture. "Kill him—if you will oblige me that much. I'll send the charge sheets in by mail this afternoon. A. W. O. L. is only part of it. That nigger's good for a million years if he serves time for everything against him."

The charge sheets missed the afternoon mail on account of a strenuous poker game into whose vortex the Wildcat's captain was drawn immediately after lunch. Thereafter from one day to another the Wildcat gradually faded from the Captain's mind—except when the Captain was just on the point of falling asleep at night.

Then came the great day upon which hostilities ceased with the signing of a scrap of paper. When the news of the armistice reached the ears of the Wildcat's captain, that gentleman did some heavy work via the cables to Washington. As a result his name was on the first list of the fortunate ones designated for immediate return to the United States. An

order issued relieving the Wildcat's Captain from field duty. It directed him to report to the Embarkation Officer at Genicart for assignment to the first available steamer sailing to New York.

Deloused, if any, and delighted, the Captain languished for many long days in the embarkation camp.

"What the hell does 'available' steamer mean?" he demanded one day.

A disappointed and overworked clerk in the transport office voiced an insubordinate but perfectly accurate reply. "It means that West Point has the right of way. You'll leave here about a year from now. You're a reserve officer, aren't you? Well, if West Point has any left-overs, you eat—and after West Point is safe home in the good old U. S. A.—you'll start—maybe."

It was then that the Wildcat's Captain began to feel alone and to miss the faithful black hands of his Wildcat servant.

VI

At two o'clock in the afternoon of a perfectly hot day six regiments of the A. E. F. stood at rigid attention while General Bore and a dozen other officers inspected them. Facing the troops and a hundred feet distant from their front ranks, there stood massed on the parade ground at Beau Desert, a disorganized mob of soldiers and spectators. Prominent in this mob was a group of brunet prisoners from the Casino de Lilas detailed that morning for the duty of policing the parade ground in preparation for the inspection and the subsequent ceremony.

The Wildcat, standing well in the center of his group of fellow offenders, held tightly to the collar of Lily, the mascot.

"Turn Lily loose, Wildcat, and see kin he graze himself some grass."

"You-all want some grass, Lily?" The Wildcat released the mascot. For a little while Lily stood still, nibbling delicately at the turf, and then she essayed a short march to the right and left.

An order barked suddenly from the center of the troop formation across the parade ground. Marching importantly down the line, followed by a group of perspiring officers, came General Bore and three other officers of equal rank. The group halted in the center of the line of troops.

Another series of orders exploded in the heated air and the soldiers did various things with their rifles.

"Attention!" Some general was speaking. General Bore protruded his chest to receive the medal that testified to his distinguished services.

Everybody stood still while General Bore began to speak. "I am not unaware," he began, "I am not unaware of the fact that the great honor conferred upon me is but a compliment to every man in my command."

Everybody stood still. Everybody, that is, except Lily. In the mascot's brain there suddenly awakened memories of a midnight kick! O, hated voice!

"You have served well and nobly through the long days of this great struggle, and every man of you from the noble quartermaster

corps down to the lowly engineers can be proud of the fact. May I not——"

"Blaa——" Lily interrupted.

"May I not then, as one of the——"

Lily, shifting to high, covered the hundred feet in three seconds. She aimed at the speaker. She followed through. She kept her head down. She made a birdie.

General Bore absorbed the shock of the mascot's weight but the point of impact was too low to add luster to an over-polished military dignity. The General in revolving touched lightly on the back of his neck. His spurs described concentric silver arcs in the sunlight. The somersault accomplished, he landed heavily on his feet like the Swiss Sweater in Act B. His final four-legged pose was that of a baby giraffe gazing deep into a desert spring.

Presently all except the younger soldiers regained enough self-control to come back to an approximate attention.

Lily, escaping cleverly into the crowd, became the center of a mob of admiring protectors. "Rally roun' Lily! Screen dat goat! Save 'at mascot! Rally roun' 'at fo'-legged T. N. T.!"

CHAPTER XIII

I

An elaborate investigation covering the origin of the bubble screen fixed the responsibility upon Vitus Marsden, colored, Fust Service Battalion, A. E. F.

Attached to the original report of the Department of Criminal Investigation was a memorandum from which General Bore discovored that the hero languished for the moment in confinement, paying an indeterminate penalty of servitude for an undiscovered offense.

The general summoned his adjutant. "Have this man brought in here—Vitus Marsden, Private, colored, First Service Battalion. They've got him at the Casino."

The Wildcat left Lily in charge of his fellow prisoners and made his way under guard to the general's headquarters, via the Dodge patrol driven by a speed king by the name of Roberts. "'At boy sho' kin ramble."

"Delivering a prisoner under personal orders of the general," the guard explained to

the orderly in the outer office. "Vitus Marsden—the Military Wildcat, they call him."

Presently, alone with the commanding general of the base, the Wildcat began his story. "'Ceptin' foh gallopin' a couple o' risk cubes wheneveh I craves action, Ah's neveh busted no reg'lations so fah as I knows." The Wildcat could look honest by straining himself.

"Crapshooter—that's it, is it?"

"Gin'ral, some calls it that."

"Do you ever lose?"

"Gin'ral, hahdly eveh! Boy in Memphis showed me once neveh to ace, dooce o' twelve—ginally Ah 'cumulates strong."

The general gazed out of his window over the roof of a vegetable market for a minute. Then suddenly he gave the Wildcat a match.

"I sentence you to a hundred years in jail," the general said. "Each one of these five cigarettes is ten years—and each one of these ten matches is five years. Your stake is one five-year match—shoot out your sentence."

"Gin'ral, yessuh. Is you all got de bones?"

The general, it appeared, had no dice in his personal equipment. That fact established,

the Wildcat felt free, in the emergency, to fish his pet gallopers out of his left shoe.

"They neveh talks 'less they's on a blanket; Neveh talks on wood."

The general moved back from the center of the rug spread on the floor of his office. "Go to it."

"Whuf! Shoots five yeahs! Fade me, white boy—lemme see dast you!"

The general, kneeling opposite the Wildcat, threw a match upon the rug. "Shoot," he said.

"Cubeb babies, whang! . . . Seven, saw de bars! Shoots ten yeahs!"

"Roll 'em." The general threw a cigarette beside the two matches on the rug.

"Jail breakers—speak to me. Ah nines. Slow death! Five an' fo', Ah craves. Ramble you rattlin' risks! Whuf!—dey reads six —tray—'at's nine. Ah lets it lay. Shoots twenty yeahs—military mascot neveh lost yit. Fade me, white boy, is you crazy?"

"I'm crazy," the general announced. "Let 'em ramble." He threw two cigarettes upon the rug.

"Bam!—an' Ah th'ows a six ace clean th'oo de ol' jail do'! Shoots it all."

"Forty years," the general said. He covered the bet. "Shoot 'em."

"Fo'ty yeahs!" The Wildcat hesitated. He picked up the dice and rolled them gently between his perspiring palms.

"Gin'ral, whah at is dis yeah jail?"

"We'll pick a good jail—roll 'em."

"Lady Luck, at yo' feet. Lily, stan' by me! Li'l jail bustehs—ramble! Wham!—an' I reads six, five, 'leven fr'm de Lawd. Gin'ral, how much does Ah owe you yit?"

"Twenty years."

"Shoots twenty yeahs. Whuf!—an' I th'ows five . . . ace an' a fo' opens de do', whah at is you? Th'ee an' two—Lady Luck—Wham!—an' Ah fives!" The Wildcat got to his feet. "Gin'ral, suh, kin Ah go now?"

The general sat back in his chair and regarded the Wildcat without answering. He rang for his adjutant. "Honorable discharge and immediate transportation to point of enlistment for this man. He has it coming to him." The general reached into the top drawer of his desk and brought out a thick package of

banknotes. "This is a navy prize awarded you for saving a convoy with that soap bubble screen. "Good work—good-by—good luck."

Twenty minutes later, en route to an embarkation camp from the Casino de Lilas, the Wildcat, his arm about the neck of Lily, the mascot goat, began to realize the first few details of the good luck which had suddenly hit him. "Hot dam! Lily, how come!"

Three days later the Wildcat leaned against the rail of a steamship about to sail for the U. S. A. Beside him, chewing heartily on an expensive cigar, stood Lily. The Wildcat's vacant eyes ceased dreaming and suddenly focused upon a familiar figure ascending the stage plank. "Cap'n Jack,, suh," he called, "how come you ketched dis boat?"

The Wildcat's former captain looked at him. "Boy, what in hell are you doin' here?"

"Cap'n, suh, I'se headed home—lemme have yo' coat an' 'at valise. I'se a casual."

"So am I," the captain said. Memories of long weeks of waiting in the embarkation camp suddenly settled upon him. He turned to the Wildcat. "Come down here and fix up my stateroom."

"Cap'n, suh—kin I take keer you on de way home?"

"If you don't," the Captain said, "if you don't, I aim to kill you whenever I get time."

"Cap'n, yessuh."

The Wildcat explained it all to Lily, the mascot. "Me an' Lady Luck plays de same game—'at's how come us headed home."

CHAPTER XIV

I

The Four-Leaved Wildcat armed with his discharge papers and homeward bound was draped loosely over the inboard rail of the steamer which still lay alongside the dock.

"Wildcat, how come here you is yet? For a sailin' nigger you is the hangin' roundest one I eveh see." A member of the Fust Service Battalion, A. E. F., spoke loudly from the Bordeaux Docks to his ex-associate.

"Boy it takes a week to git dis ol' boat's insides hot," the Wildcat called back. "When she does begin steamin' us lan's in Memphis next day."

"Tell the folks 'howdy' when you sees 'em in Memphis. You sure is got a drag—all us does is sweat and carry things round de docks here whilst you plays in de big money."

"Me an' Lily lays right wid Lady Luck," the Wildcat explained. "All us does f'm now on is to eat heavy an' sleep day an' night."

Lily, the goat ex-mascot of the Fust Service

Battalion, munched thoughtfully on a cigar ration which the Wildcat had issued, and said nothing.

The call of a bugle floated up from an open hatch.

"Lily, 'at's mess call. I ties you heah 'til I 'sorbs mah rations." The Wildcat lashed the mascot to the rail with a complicated series of bends and hitches which cost him thirty places in the mess line which was forming below decks.

"Sho' lost out on de fust table. Might as well see if ol' Cap'n Jack wants anythin'." He made his way to the stateroom occupied by the former commander of the Fust Service Battalion where he discovered Captain Jack deep in the composition of a cablegram.

"Cap'n, does I bring you a snack of lunch here or does you plan to eat out in de main cabin? 'Fo' long us'll be eatin' at home. Sho' feels noble startin'."

"Get out of here and leave me alone." The captain plunged back into his cablegram. It was addressed to a girl whose father's name was on the lips of every city editor in the United States. To the Captain this girl meant

life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, yesterday, to-day and to-morrow.

The Captain's one concern at the moment was to tame his cablegram down so that plain English might convey a message for which there had been no words at the hour of his departure, months and years and centuries before.

As far as the Captain was concerned the Wildcat was almost superfluous. "Get out of here and leave me alone," the Captain repeated.

"Cap'n, yessuh."

The Wildcat stumbled down another flight of iron stairs and elbowed his way into a place at the dining table in the mess hall. "Boy, stand back. My appetite aches." He wedged himself in between two of his kind who were engaged in cutting down the starvation handicap as much as possible while opportunity offered.

"Pass 'at meat. I aims to line myse'f complete with meat, an' inside de meat I builds me a fillin' of potatoes, an' inside the potatoes I yearns to 'cumulate me some mo' meat."

"Yearn a lot, the yearnin's free. Is you as

good at eatin' as you is at talkin' you gets the belt."

The Wildcat grunted and for a little while his entire vocabularly consisted of grunts. After five minutes strenuous exertion his jaws slowed up enough to let him speak a few words to various companions about him. He selected a victim across the table who for the moment was speechless with potatoes.

"Gizzard Buster, one more li'l meal like this an yo' mil'tary bearin' will be draggin' the ground. You sho' surrounds yo' groceries noble—call me champion ration ketcher! I'se champion in some things but I bows low to you when it comes to eatin' heavy."

A brunet orderly considerably puffed up under an assortment of side arms entered the mess hall.

" 'Tenshun!" he called.

Nobody paid any attention to him.

"When I eats I aims to let nobody 'fluence me." The Wildcat continued diligently with his work.

" 'Tenshun!" the orderly yelled again.

The Wildcat sat up and looked around.

"Boy, on your way. Look out 'at automatic

don't blow up and tear a ham offen you." The Wildcat supplemented his oration with a tense whisper: "White man!" and then in a voice as loud as the included groceries would permit he augmented the orderly's command with one of his own.

"Come to 'tenshun there! Don't you see 'at officeh?" The aggregation stopped eating.

"Ain't no officer. Ain't got no backin' up strap to his Sam Browne belt."

The Y. M. C. A. white man began to speak. "At seven o'clock to-night," he said, "there will be preaching on the forward deck. The subject will be "Polygamy vs. Monogamy." He left the mess room.

The Wildcat addressed his companions: "What us needs is mo' gin 'stead of so much preachin'. Wisht I wuz in Memphis. All us gits out of dis polyg'my monotony business is big words. What 'at boy mean 'polyg'my'?"

A boy farther down the line who had been exposed to some schooling spoke up. "Wildcat, polyg'my means does you go to jail to keep three or four wild women from claimin' your remains or does you let a couple mo' of 'em carve you up 'count they's yo' next of kin."

"No woman claims me. Only next of kin I got is fo' dollahs I owes Miss Cuspidora Lee at de boa'din' house in Memphis."

The Wildcat got up from the table. He put a couple of boiled potatoes in his shirt pocket. "'Specting a hard winter?" one of his companions asked.

"Feedin' my mascot. That goat Lily what brung me luck."

"How come?"

"Boy, ever since I'se at the otheh end of the rope whut's round Lily's neck me an' Lady Luck's been married."

"Wilecat, I got some divorcin' dice, does you crave action?"

The Wildcat looked at the owner of the dice. "Don't start sarcastin' me. Ah cleans you beggin' in fo' passes after I feeds Lily. All I says, does anybody crave a ride to the poorhouse I meets 'em in the cellar below in five minutes."

The Wildcat went above and fed the goat Lily the boiled potatoes with his right hand, while he caressed her gently between the horns with his left. "Lily," he said aloud, "stan' by

me! In five minutes the li'l gallopers begins to ramble. Ah aims to collect heavy."

The Wildcat's captain stepped up beside him. In Captain Jack's eyes was a faraway look. "Son," he said, "get me a pair of dice."

"Cap'n, yessuh." The Wildcat dived downward as if to curry a flea bite on his left ankle and came to the surface with a pair of dice in his right hand. "Cap'n, suh, here dey is, steamed up fo' action."

In the shock of surprise which followed the Captain's demand the Wildcat forgot that the impending financial battle would find him unarmed.

The Captain took the dice and went to his stateroom where presently he began reading the upturned faces of the dice in an attempt to discover in the law of averages whether She loved him or She loved him not. Three thousand miles to the West the She girl was writing a radiogram which would have cleared up the subject in the Captain's mind if he could have read it at the moment.

II

Three decks down, the Wildcat explored himself and produced forty dollars in greenbacks. "Hogface," he said, "where at's de bones?"

The Wildcat reached for the dice. "Shoots a dollar—cash, rally round. Readin' class, read 'em. They says seven. I lets it lay—Whuf! I heads fo' seven, but I swerves to eight. Dice, I marks you duty. I'se a eighter f'm Decatur. Fo' an' fo'. At ease—you loses! I lets it lay—Hogface, shower down yo' money. Whang—she reads eleven! Hogface, feel the knife. Ah lets it lay. Persimmon money, the frost'll git you when the panic comes. Ah th'ows hard times! As you wuz! And Ah nines."

"Slow death."

"Nine I craves. Bones, git right. Pair o' dice! Paradise means hell fo' you. Ah eight's. Come, Great Deliverer!"

"Wilecat, you is dead. Yo' tombstones reads seven. Han' me 'em bones."

Liver Lip, the next in the circle slammed a

pair of sinful cubes. "Here's whah Ah starts. Read five. Ah's alive. Wham!"

"Reads seven. Ah views de remains."

The Wildcat's fingers itched to regain the dice. "You sure slings painful bone, but yo' pains yo'se'f. Han' dem babies to Pink Eye."

Pink Eye died sudden.

The Wildcat glanced sideways as he reached for the dice, approximating the roll of money which Hogface held in his left hand. "Shoots twenty. Hogface, I needs action. Cover twenty. Nigger, at rest! Dey reads seven. Money, at ease. Shoots fo'ty. Shoots fo'ty. Shoots fo'ty! Century plant growed up an' fell over whilst Ah waits f'r action."

Hogface peeled forty dollars from his roll. The Wildcat rubbed the dice on the back of his head and lifted them high in the air. "Lady Luck, at yo' feet! Whang! An' Ah reads six. Frogskin money you gits a furlough. Wham! Lady Luck, I kneels befo' you. Fo' an' one is five. Nigger, taste de quinine. Whuf! Lady Luck, I bows low."

Having posed the Wildcat at her feet, kneeling before her and bowing low, Lady Luck put on a pair of hobnailed marching shoes. She

sneaked around behind the Wildcat and aimed a T. N. T. kick at him.

Lady Luck's foot landed heavy. Financially speaking, the Wildcat's remains were spattered all over the scenery. He read his doom in the seven black dots that lay on the face of the dice. He staggered painfully to his feet. Once on his feet he began to haul in his lower jaw which had sagged something less than a foot.

"Where at is you goin'?" The Wildcat had started for the stairway.

"I aims to throw 'at mascot overboa'd."

"You has a dollar yet—see kin you build it up." Hogface wise to his peculiar cubes which he had introduced, craved a hundred per cent catastrophe for his opponent.

"Pair o' dice is hell for me is it?" he taunted. "Wilecat, I say you got a spoonful of brimstone. Shoots a dollar."

The Wildcat covered his bet with his last dollar bill.

"Let 'em ramble. Hogface launched a pair of fives into a waiting world and thereafter for what seemed centuries to the Wildcat the galloping dominoes refused to speak.

The seven and eleven seemed lost beyond recall. The Wildcat began to squirm around on the hooks of suspense. Presently he itched. Itching, he scratched.

"'Tenshun!" In the bulkhead door stood a medical officer with gold leaves on his shoulder and a couple of snakes biting each other pinned to his collar. The Wildcat struggled to his feet. He grabbed the dice, neglecting however to accumulate the dollar bills whose ownership was not yet established.

The officer pointed to the Wildcat. "You boy, come here."

"Gin'ral, yessuh." The Wildcat came to attention in front of the medical officer.

"Did I see you scratching yourself just now?"

"Gin'ral, mebbe Ah scratched some."

The "General" wrote briefly on a pad which he produced from a pocket of his blouse. "Report to the commanding officer of the delousing plan at once."

"Me?" The Wildcat's lower jaw stayed down.

The medical officer, having gratified his official appetite, wasted a moment on his lat-

est victim. "I mean you. Anybody that's as far from lonesome externally as you seem to be sure needs another trip through the mill."

"Gin'ral, suh, Ah read mah shirt only dis mawnin'—they wasn't nothin' theh 'ceptin' some lint."

The General's manner changed. "Don't talk back. Get ashore before I put you in irons."

The irons business sounded far from noble. The Wildcat clambered up the stairway and walked over to where Lily was tied to the rail.

Several members of the Fust Service Battalion working on the dock below spotted the Wildcat. The Backslid Baptist called up at him: "Boy, ain't you gone yet?" The Wildcat started down the gangplank leading Lily. "How come you unloadin'?" The Wildcat started a complicated explanation to a group which gathered around him. After the third false start he was interrupted.

"Wildcat, once you was a sergeant and they redoosted you. Once Ah figgered you was de' bigges' liar in de world. Now I knows you is. You and yo' 'ficial business! You's been washed ashore."

The Wildcat looked at his companions. "Mebbe you is right." He started away.

"Where at is you headed fo'?" The Wildcat took up the slack end of Lily's tow line. "Lily, head round heah! Me? Doctor says I'se 'fested. Right now I aims to ketch up 'ith Lady Luck and beat 'at woman to death."

He started away from the docks along the road that would presently lead up the hill to the delousing plant at Genicart.

Late that night the adjutant at the receiving camp directed the Wildcat to report to some place or other which the Wildcat forgot. He saluted and shambled out of the office where the mascot awaited him.

"Lily, us heads back for St. Sulpice where de old gang is. What us needs is to get attached for rations an' six blankets and all de sleep what is."

CHAPTER XV

I

At midnight the "Texan", carrying the Wildcat's Captain Jack, the victorious Hogface and the Wildcat's forty dollars, cleared on the ebb tide for Paulliac, the mouth of the Gironde and the jump across the Atlantic. Before the ship had fairly started downstream a radiogram was received on board for Captain Jack. That officer was at the moment several dollars under the surface of a sea of poker. One of the stewards handed Captain Jack the message. He read it hastily and turned to an officer seated near him. "Play my hand," he said. "I'm done." He walked quickly to his stateroom. He laid the message on his locker and began to buckle the straps about a suitcase which lay open on the floor.

He glanced at the message. "Sailing to-day with Papa Peace Congress Paris."

Captain Jack locked his suitcase. He picked up the message and left the stateroom. He made his way to the office of the ship's sur-

geon where he found that officer engaged in mixing himself an invigorating drink.

"I have yellow fever, smallpox and bubonic plague," Captain Jack stated. "I want an order putting me ashore with the mail boat at Paulliac. I prefer to die in France. I love France."

The ship's surgeon looked at him. "Mix yourself a drink. You are also mentally unbalanced."

"Surge, beside those other diseases," Captain Jack said, "I have heart disease." He showed the ship's surgeon the radiogram. "Papa is the biggest professional senator in the known world. He will stay in Paris until the show finishes. Dead or alive I propose to meet Papa in Paris and relieve him of all responsibility as far as his daughter is concerned. Will you or will you not put me and my heart disease ashore at Paulliac?"

The surgeon looked at him. "I'm not a reserve officer. I never take chances. I will not put you ashore at Paulliac."

Captain Jack hesitated a moment. "All I can say is that you are a fine son of a——"

"However," the surgeon interrupted, "if you

care to go ashore for me officially to get me one thousand shots of flu dope from the Naval Station I will give you a clearance and may God have mercy on my soul!"

Captain Jack held out his hand. "Surge, I'll say you are a regular navy man. Orders is orders. Write one quick so I can carry the document in my hand."

The surgeon summoned a messenger and pretty soon Captain Jack was the possessor of an order which authorized him to go ashore at Paulliac. In the cold dawn he clambered down the ship's side and boarded the Navy yawl which lay alongside. Twenty minutes later he was lost in the jungles of the A. E. F.

II

The Wildcat attached himself and Lily for rations several times at various camps while he was covering the twenty miles between the Bordeaux docks and St. Sulpice. For the first few days his presence at St. Sulpice was not officially noted. Most of the time he spent hanging around the kitchen. Reveille and

taps, drills, formations and inspections, meant nothing to him.

"Sure is de grandes' army Ah ever see." For awhile he was so busy eating that he hardly had time to sleep and then there came a time when he was so busy sleeping that he had difficulty in doing justice to the rations which lay in profusion around him.

"Only trouble us is got is short days." Heaven to the Wildcat was a place just like St. Sulpice, only with days two or three times as long. Not until payday did he realize the disadvantage of being a free-lance soldier. Other boys marched up and got eighty-three francs or more, depending on their grade and how the Government happened to be feeling that day, but the Wildcat lingered in the background thoughtfully thumbing Hogface's dice and wondering where at could he git himself a stake to build up with.

Payday progressed as fast as the clocks could make it but somehow the Wildcat failed to collect. At evening he was sitting on the ground at one corner of his bunkhouse, enjoying the last rays of the sun. "Come easy, go easy"—Ah cubes myse'f rich an' Lady Luck

runs me ragged." Softly he began to hum his old philosophy:

"Ah don't bother work, work don't bother me;
I'se fo' times as happy as a buh-humble bee.
Eats when Ah kin git it, sleeps mos' all de time,
Ah don't give a doggone if de sun don't neveh shine.

"Ah kin ride a freight train, I don't pay no fare,
I kin ride a steamboat mos' anywhere.
'At's de reason I'se as happy as a bee——
I don't bother work an' work don't bother me."

The mascot, Lily, hearing her master's voice, came parading around the corner of the bunkhouse. Lily had been toying with a salad course and fragments of her menu showed about her mouth. In the corner of her jaw, drooping modestly with its noble suggestion, hung a four-leaf clover.

In the growing darkness the Wildcat grabbed Lily by the head while he inspected the talisman in the goat's mouth. "Lady Luck, I heahs you! De jail door's open at las'!"

In an adjoining bunkhouse the big crap game was in progress. Around it at the four doors of the structure four more smaller

games were going strong. The Wildcat elbowed his way into the fringe of one of these smaller groups. "Boy," he said to one of the non-combatants, "leave me mortgage Lily to you fo' a hundred francs." The mustard colored soldier looked at him without reply.

The Wildcat made a vociferous announcement. "Ah'll tell the world dis mascot's worth a million dollahs fo' luck. Any boy here whut lends me fifty francs gits a mortgage on Lily. Fo'ty francs—thirty francs—twenty francs——"

The Backslid Baptist, against whom luck had been running pretty measly in spite of his personal dice, handed a twenty franc note to the Wildcat. "I lends you twenty—see what kin you do."

The Wildcat took the twenty franc note with his right hand, listening meanwhile to the betting in the big game. Hundred franc notes seemed to be common currency. He edged into one of the satellite games near the door. Lily, still following him in spite of the temporary change of proprietors, shadowed close behind him. In the Wildcat's hand, under the twenty franc note, lay Hogface's dice.

The Wildcat knelt in the doorway of the bunkhouse. Behind him, standing on the ground, was the faithful mascot. "Shoots twenty francs," the Wildcat announced. "Keep yo' dice—Ah has my own."

"Boy, roll 'em."

"Wham! Seven. Shoots forty francs."

"Boy, roll 'em."

"Wham! Seven. Shoots eighty francs."

"Boy, roll 'em."

"Bam! Lilly Joe—an' two an' two comes back." The Wildcat dragged down part of his winnings."

"Shoots a hund'ed francs."

Thereafter for five minutes with unvaried monotony the Wildcat found seven, eleven or his point. He began to attract the attention of some of the experts in the big game. "Boys, ol' Wilecat done come back."

"Lemme see dem dice." A saddle-colored giant who had been whittled down to a financial zero in three passes carefully inspected the Wildcat's dice. "Risk cube looks all right," he grunted.

"Dey is all right. Dey knows their man-

ager. Is you broke stan' back. Shoots a hund'ed francs."

A successful poker player in the big game, scenting wide action, deserted his companions and covered the Wildcat's bet. He was presently followed by several more large rolls of money completely surrounded by cinnamon colored fists. Pretty soon the Wildcat, kneeling in the doorway of the bunkhouse, had become the center of attraction for the Fust Service Battalion. His hat on the floor beside him was half full of crumpled fifty franc notes, moist with the perspiration of dusky palms.

In the darkness outside the doorway Lily the mascot bleated faintly. "Sing loud, Lily—Ah buys you a gol' watch an' chain to-morrow."

"Blaa," sang Lily. "Wildcat, dear Wildcat, come home while you're rich."

The Wildcat paid no heed to Lily's warning. "Shoots a hund'ed francs. Bam! These cubes is poison. I reads eleven. Shoots two hundred."

"Boy, roll 'em."

The Wildcat rolled 'em. "Bones means bonus. Shoots fo' hund'ed. Laz'rus come

fo'th. Is dat money meat, you was lucky does you get de gravy. Shower down, brother, shower down. Git weak while Ah git strong. Pam! An' it says six Ace!"

The Wildcat gathered in his latest winnings and rammed the banknotes into the hat beside him. The money market tightened up a little. "Shower down, brothers, I shoots fifty francs." Three "brothers" pooled and covered the bet. "Whuf! Five an' a deuce. I lets it lay."

Nobody seemed inclined to cover the bet. The Wildcat dragged down all except twenty francs.

"Iodine dice, you is marked duty. Shoots twenty francs. Shoots twenty francs. Cash, rally round. How come everybody slowed up?"

"Everybody's slowed up 'cause payday's done built a nest in yo' hat."

The Wildcat had accumulated practically all of the surplus funds of the Fust Service Battalion's payday.

"Shoots ten francs. Any boy? Any boy? Is all you niggers bust? Ah couldn't a killed you quicker had Ah th'owed gas bombs. Shoots five francs. Shower down five francs."

The Backslid Baptist produced his last five franc note. "Boy," he said, "here's where Ah starts to build up."

The Wildcat spun a pair of careless cubes. "Gallopers, as you wuz! Oveh the riveh. Six an' five! Backslid you is skinned alive. At Res'! Money, come heah."

The Wildcat picked up the two five franc notes and reached back to shove them into his hat on the doorsill. Deep in the hat, his hand encountered Lily's munching jaws and deeper still the mascot's cold nose was exploring a vacancy which had been filled a little while before by highly scented French banknotes.

The Wildcat jerked the mascot's head into the light. To the mascot's jaw which an hour before had been garnished with the four-leaf clover there adhered the corner of a hundred franc note. Somebody in the crowd saw it.

"Lily's et payday! Git a bayonet an' empty dat goat!" The Wildcat was about to reach for the razor which dangled between his shoulder blades under his shirt when some naturalist postponed the major operation which would have considerably embarrassed Lily's health and strength.

"Payday's gone. Money's gone. Goats digests grub sudden."

The Wildcat grabbed his four-legged treasury department by the horns. "Lily, you long-haired bank, wuz you human Ah'd feed you to de hogs."

"Lay off 'at goat!" the Backslid Baptist interposed. "I holds a twenty franc mortgage on him."

The Wildcat shoved his remaining ten francs to the Backslid one. "Take dis. You and me is partners in dis mascot. Keep me off'n him is all I says. Keep me off'n him 'til Ah tames down."

CHAPTER XVI

Captain Jack remained discreetly under cover in Paulliac for a week as a welcome guest of the Navy gang. He crossed the river one evening and at Blaye, having avoided all local military police, he boarded a train headed for Paris. He arrived in Paris two days later, just in time to participate as a victim in one of the periodical military raids which ever and anon added zest to the business of being A. W. O. L.

"But what the hell do we care?" he asked a brother victim en route to that section of the bull pen reserved for officers of the A. E. F., who strayed from the straight and crooked line of military red tape. He headed blithely for his prison. Papa's daughter, light of a midnight world, was headed for Paris, and Captain Jack trusted his luck.

Three days later the Paris edition of The Herald announced the arrival of Papa. "The Senator is accompanied by his daughter."

A week later, having failed in five official attempts to avoid an impending general court-martial, which appeared to be a pretty serious business, Captain Jack was not so blithe. For various obvious reasons, the Captain had refrained from communicating with his Lady of Love, who at that moment was wondering why the devil her prodigal Romeo had not answered her radiogram. Her Papa Senator busy with his stomach and affairs of state involving the fate of several nations, interested himself in discovering Captain Jack's trail.

It developed that the officer had been last seen on board the "Texan" at Paulliac, headed home, and that he had not landed in New York.

II

The great storage depot at St. Sulpice had functioned properly and the end of the war had rendered the hundreds of buildings useless, and so, presently, the chemical fire extinguishers ordered fourteen months before, began to arrive.

A colonel with varnished boots appointed a fire marshal to take charge of the equipment

and the fire marshal appointed a fire officer to organize a system whereby the ghost of greatness could be saved in the event of a fire breaking out.

The fire officer, busy with the details of fabricating this organization from the human timber about him walked past a hut in which the Wildcat was doing the best he could to rest himself so that he would have strength enough to eat a heavy supper.

"Ah kin ride a freight train mos' anywhere," the Wildcat sang.

"What grieves me is why don't you ride one, Wilecat?" one of his auditors commented. "You says you kin do lots. All Ah see you do is lay round sleepin', 'ceptin' when you gits up to eat."

"Boy, Ah kin do lots. Ah kin cut me lawns an' Ah kin aviate. Ah tames wild animals. Lily, come heah. Wid horses an' mules Ah ain't seed my equal. I'se champion mule driver of de world, an' wid de gallopin' dominoes——"

The fire officer poked his head inside the hut. "Boy, you say you can handle horses?"

"'Tenshun!" The Wildcat got to his feet. "Cap'n, yessuh. Shore kin."

"And mules?"

"Cap'n, suh, Ah knows mules so good dat sometimes Ah think dey's mule blood in me."

"Come with me." The Captain led the way over to a corral where some desperate looking mules were trying to eat their daily allowance of expensive hay.

"Get a couple of them mules," the Captain directed. "Bring them over to the chemical fire engine. The red painted one. Hitch 'em up and keep 'em ready at all hours. Keep 'em ready to answer any fire alarms. You're on duty from one o'clock until eight o'clock at night."

"Cap'n, when does Ah eat?"

"Don't bother me with details. Carry out your orders or I'll cremate your constitution."

"Cap'n, yessuh." The Wildcat walked over and mentally selected a couple of agile looking mules. "Mules, you an' me is the fire department with a red wagon hitched onto us. Come over heah." The black mule drooped a casual ear. The gray one sneered as much as a mule could sneer with his face full of hay.

Thirty minutes later with the assistance of half the Fust Service Battalion the Wildcat had succeeded in festooning his four-legged victims with a variegated assortment of harness, parts of which were hooked up to the chemical fire wagon. His labors finished for the moment he reclined languidly on the top seat of the red painted fire wagon. Below him on the ground there lingered a group of his brunet associates.

"Hand up 'at mascot," the Wildcat directed. Lily was boosted up to the seat beside the Wildcat, and in this inconspicuous position the pair waited and waited and waited for the first alarm of the fire department. The army was short on fire alarms that afternoon and when his relief came at eight o'clock the Wildcat had not turned an official wheel.

"Sho' have to get me a cushion fo' 'at seat or else set on Lily." He climbed down from the fire apparatus and walked hastily to the kitchen where he did the best he could to eat himself to death.

"Ah aims to nutrify myse'f heavy 'til adiposity sleeps me," he said after the fourth helping of roast pork had disappeared down his neck.

III

Two days after the Wildcat had established himself as conductor of the four-wheeled fire department of St. Sulpice a fire guard down among the warehouses sought to justify his career by taking a couple of illicit outdoor drags on a cigarette. Having successfully busted this recent "No Smoking" order he threw the cigarette away and made the rounds of a group of buildings which he was guarding.

Returning to the site of his nicotine picnic ten minutes later he was surprised to discover a grass fire well under way. He hurried over to the next guard and borrowed three cartridges which he fed into his rifle, after which he discharged the piece in the air according to regulations.

Further down the yard a siren signal sounded. The Wildcat heard it. "Lily," he said to the mascot beside him, "'at's de evenin' quittin' whistle. Us eats now."

An excited officer came tearing out of headquarters. "Boy," he said to the Wildcat, "why

the hell don't you answer that fire signal? Get out of town before I kill you."

The Wildcat needed no second order. "Lily, let's go." He shook the kinks out of the lines and burned the accelerator into the epidermis of the starboard mule. The mule turned round and gave him a pained look. "On yo' way!" The Wildcat poured the leather into his four-legged motive power.

The black mule shifted to second. Passing the camp limits the Wildcat was standing up in his seat like a chariot racer. Halfway down the yard, between the camp and Izon, the Wildcat resolved to swing to the right into a road which led to the scene of the fire, but at Izon the mules were writing some sixty mile history on the surface of France.

On the long stretch of straight road which lay between Izon and the banks of the Garonne at San Pardon the Wildcat discovered that he was chaperoning a duplex runaway. "Never knowed mules could run so fast."

In the next few minutes he learned considerably more about mules. Ben Hur, Paul Revere and Mazeppa were as good as left at the post when the cyclone hit San Pardon. Headed

straight for the river the Wildcat sought refuge in religion. He discovered that mules were slow in answering prayers. He cut loose an assorted string of profanity which rang high above the rattle around him.

"Ah, ze crazy Americans again." A languid French farmer glanced idly at the four-wheeled tornado which clattered through the streets of the deserted town. Fifty feet from the edge of the dock the mules played a low-down trick on the Wildcat and his personally conducted mascot. They swung sharply to the right, unhitched themselves almost naked and went up an alley where cheering cognac could be bought for fifty centimes a drink.

The Wildcat and Lily, considerably festooned with the crimson chemical fire department, plunged straight ahead until the humidity became thick enough to swim in.

"Good mawnin'——" The rest of the salutation was gurgled up with the gentle waves of the Garonne River. Coming to the surface, the Wildcat struck out straight away from the fate which lay behind him. The mascot swam strongly downstream into the distance. She gave a plaintive bleat of farewell.

Over his shoulder the Wildcat glimpsed his four-legged comrade. "Lily, you hell-raisin' hoodoo, good-by." The Wildcat went away from there headed across the river as fast as swinging arms could drag him.

CHAPTER XVII

The lookout in the crow's nest of the "Texan" headed upstream toward Bordeaux on her return trip from New York congratulated himself that in fifteen minutes he would be off watch. "Ja Da, Ja Da," he sang softly, "Ja Da, Ja Da, Alyce Lee." At the top of his voice he added a few more words not in the original text. "Three points to the starboard, sir," he yelled, and five seconds later the telegraph in the engine room read "Full astern."

A boat swung down from the davits and cast off. It headed for the swimmer in the distance. Presently the boat returned alongside the ship. "Only a blasted goat," the bo'sun called up to the officer on the bridge.

"Best luck in the world," that sailor called back. "Heave him on board. Warm him up and feed him." A signal rang in the engine room and the "Texan" resumed her course.

Lily the mascot, enjoying the attention of half the crew below decks, felt that after all

life was real, life was noble and that mascots fared better in the Navy than they did in the Army anyway.

II

The Wildcat made the far bank of the Garonne as night fell. As he dragged himself up the bank he reflected that he was a pretty tired lizard, but that his only hope of retaining his health and strength lay in putting many miles between himself and the hornet officers of St. Sulpice.

At dawn he boarded a train which was pulling out of Libourne. "Ah kin ride a freight train mos' anywhere." The train consisted of a dozen passenger coaches and five freight cars. The Wildcat selected a flat car on which were carried two immense wine casks. Between the curved staves of the casks and the deck of the car he found seclusion enough to prevent his being discovered by the languid police at the various stations along the line.

"Ah sho' is hongry." Soldiers in olive drab along the road made it advisable for him to keep traveling.

"Mebbe dis ol' whale of a barrel has good

sorghum in it." The Wildcat dug his knife into the oaken staves which lay above him. After four hours' work the knife blade penetrated the barrel and a thin stream of crimson wine leaped downward to the Wildcat's open mouth.

"Never knowed ol' Van Red tasted so good." During the course of the succeeding forty-eight hours the Wildcat did the best he could to drink up a few hundred gallons of wine.

He woke up in the brilliant sunlight of Marseilles. He batted his eyes and sat up. The train had stopped. "Wonder where at is Ah at? Ol' Vang Rouge sho' steams a boy up, but it ain't fillin'."

Memories of St. Sulpice returned to him. He recalled the fact that his one object in life was to travel. He sneaked out of the railroad yards and made his way to the sea wall against which lay ships of half the world.

Marching toward him came a battalion of French negro soldiers. "Boom-a-loom niggers," he said as he saw the curved bayonets on their guns. Having nothing better to do he fell in step beside them, seeking concealment in their color.

"Wisht Ah could talk boom-a-loom. Den Ah'd be wid frien's." One of the soldiers hauled a fragment of bread from his pocket. The Wildcat invented a sign language on the instant and a moment later he was eating the best bread he had ever tasted.

"Sho' is gran' bread," he said aloud. One of the French negroes spoke to him in English. "You are hungry?"

"Ah'll say Ah is. Four days since Ah et. Boy, how come you talks nach'ral an' not dis boom-a-loom talk?"

"For many years," the soldier answered, "I have been a guide for white men,—British hunters of lions."

"Sho' nuff. Sho' sounds nach'ral. Where at is you headed fo' now?" He edged over and marched beside the soldier of the Senegal.

"St. Louis," the soldier replied.

The Wildcat walked along in silence for quite a while. "Ain't 'at lucky? Me, I'se sick of France. I'd give all I'se got to go wid you to St. Louis."

"How much?"

The Wildcat remembered his financial condition. "Ah ain't got nuthin' now. Some day

Ah will have. St. Louis sho' sounds like Heaven to me."

"In the front lines one of your kind saved my life," the Senegalese replied. "Follow beside me." An hour later the Wildcat was stowed away in the darkness of the hold of the "Walata."

At dawn the ship cleared the harbor of Marseilles. Two days later she steamed through the Strait of Gibraltar. South of Portugal she headed into the Atlantic.

"I figgers when we starts upstream f'm N'O'leans, I unloads at Memphis," the Wildcat reflected. "St. Louis is all right, but it's too far No'th." A surge of triumph suddenly inspired him. "Hot damn boy! I'se Memphis boun'."

After a seven-day voyage the "Walata" landed. The Wildcat, wearing borrowed clothes and surrounded by Senegalese troops marched ashore. Close beside him was the ex-guide.

"Sho' is hot weather," the Wildcat remarked. "I never see such a crazy lookin' town. Whut's de name of dis town?" he asked.

The lion hunter's guide looked at him quickly without reply.

"At morning," the guide said, "we move. Inland there is food in abundance."

"Sho' suits me, boy," the Wildcat replied. "I aims to drag along to whah de grub trees grows heaviest."

At morning the Wildcat and his companion headed up a trail which followed the south bank of the river. At noon, perspiring freely under the sun, the Wildcat brought up the subject of food. "When does us eat?" he inquired loudly.

The lion hunting guide looked at him. "At Podor we camp."

"That's over in Arkansas, ain't it?"

"Senegal," the guide corrected.

"Sunny Gal—how come?" The Wildcat stopped. "How far f'm St. Louis is us right now?"

"We left the steamboat at St. Louis," the guide replied.

The Wildcat felt his head going round and round. "Boy," he said, "where in hell is us at?"

The guide of lion hunters answered him.

"St. Louis is the capital of Senegal,—on the West coast of Africa."

That night, in the heart of the jungle, the Wildcat did some heavy thinking. "Lady Luck," he prayed, "git right or else lay off complete. Sunny Gal! Africa! Wisht ol' Cap'n Jack wuz here!"

CHAPTER XVIII

I

The Wildcat, up to his neck in Senegal, had been lured to an African doom by some geography man too triflin' to think up any new name for the city of St. Louis on the African West Coast. He looked at the trail which dived into the jungle ahead of him and figgered it was time to back up.

"Lady Luck sho' is cross-eyed. She aimed to be dirty, she pulled de trigger,—an' heah I is." As far as he could see the cards of Destiny were so gummed up that no matter what turn of luck might switch the cut the stacked deck would still guarantee him a hundred per cent voodoo record.

The party of discharged French Colonial troops was eating their evening meal on the African trail. Seated beside the Wildcat was the native whose experience as a guide of big game hunters had given him the wildcat's language.

From the distant hilltops there came the

faint moaning of a war drum. The guide listened for a moment. He rose to his full height. "Illy maru eeyah!" He addressed the group around him. "M'baou tlk——"

"Hold de deal," the Wildcat interrupted. "Ball Head, what ails you?"

The guide looked down at him. "The tribal drums are sounding. There is flesh of the enemy in the cooking pots to-night among my people in the hills."

"How come?"

"Those whom we kill we eat."

"You eats folks!"

"Even so," the guide replied.

The Wildcat was silent for a moment. "Ball Head," he said, "the more you is at home the more I ain't. Lily, my mascot, she's sunk in de ocean. Ol' Cap'n, he's home in Memphis. Lady Luck, she's A. W. O. L. Me,—Ball Head, I'se much 'bliged to meet you, but I leaves you now before we gits near yo' home rest'rant where you eats humans."

The Wildcat was confronted with three alternatives. He had the choice of staying where he was in the jungles while his one friend and the friendly caravan moved on, or he could re-

turn to civilization where a fatal military verdict awaited with open arms throughout the A. E. F., or he could accompany the caravan inland.

"You are not in danger," the guide replied. "Only the enemy is eaten. You would better accompany us."

"What does this here enemy live on?" the Wildcat asked. "No suh, Ball Head, I figgers I'se goin' back. His calculations were interrupted by a large mottled green tree trunk which glided through the jungles carrying a head on the front end of it.

"Ball Head, stan' by me—what's 'at!"

"That is but the father of snakes," the guide replied.

"Boy, hold me! Fo' foot snakes is tol'able. Six foot snakes I hates. When dey gits oveh six foot mah legs acts automatic." The Wildcat decided to stick with the gang, at least until the light of dawn might discover unto him the trail which lay to the seaport town.

"What otheh kind of boa'din' house is you got wheh we're gwine 'sides dis human rest'-rant?" he asked.

"For each warrior there are a dozen wives,"

Ball Head informed him. "You will be a great warrior. While your wounds are healing your wives bring you food."

"How come dis wound business?"

"War is perpetual in our hills and the spears of the enemy are sharp."

The Wildcat lay back and groaned. "Wuz hard luck a dewdrop I'se de Mississip'!" With misery selling at three francs a ton the Wildcat figured he had a million dollars' worth.

"Does you go out wid a spear you comes home,—mebbe. Mos' likely you gits et up or cut up. Does you come home, twelve wives gits you. 'At woman in de' boad'in' house at Memphis led me a dog's life, let alone twelve like her. I'll head where de res' of de boys does, 'sides them what fights other boys an' them whut fights the twelve wives."

"The rest of them, except for the children, are hunters."

"'At's a job I'd like. Always did love to hunt rabbits an' squirrels. You got any good houn' dogs?"

"The yams which have been baking
In the fire of damnable wet wood
Are ready for any son of a gun

With pep enough in him
To come and get them."

Thus sang the yam cooker in his own tongue.

"Ball Head, whut ails 'at boy?"

"He announces that the yams are ready to be eaten," Ball Head replied.

"'At's me. I'se a yam eatin' field hand f'm way back,—'specially wid gravy. Africa ain't so bad. Is they lots of yams?"

"More than the men of the tribe can eat," the guide replied.

"Africa ain't so bad," the Wildcat repeated. "Plenty yams an' huntin'. Sleep mos' all de time. How's de lodges—kin a boy join any good fraternal gatherin's?"

"Each of the hill tribes is a band of blood brothers."

"'At's me. Ah figgers Ah'll 'filiate quick's I lan's at yo' home town."

The night built a wall about the Wildcat and presently, with the past forgotten, his mind sought to outline the schedule for the days which lay ahead of him.

"Fust I 'filiates wid a lodge. Then I goes huntin'. I stays huntin' 'til I gits hungry. I loads myse'f up on game an' I weighs down de

game wid yams. Does I git tired huntin' I gits me a job drivin' a automobile o' mebbe runnin' a street car. Sure glad I'se out of de Army. All I'se got lef' is dese pants an' dey's too small since I begun eatin' heavy."

He listened to the night noises in the dense jungle about him. "Me scared? I guess mebbe if dese otheh boys gits by I kin. Me, I sticks close to Ball Head. Lady Luck, whenever you gits th'oo prancin' roun', here I is."

He called to the guide. "Ball Head, where at kin a boy git a drink of gin or mebbe coon-yak?"

Out of the circle of firelight the guide came walking over toward him. "In our hills there are no such things." The guide fumbled for a moment with a knot of his loin cloth. "When the hunter is tired, when the great hunter is cold, when the trail has been long, forgetfulness comes with the magic of this bean."

He extended his open palm toward the Wildcat. In it lay five or six beans the size of grains of corn. "Take one of them," the guide said. "Do not eat more than half of it. They are very potent."

The Wildcat disdained his friend's advice.

"When I aims to git jazzed up I aims to git jazzed up. Give me dem beans." He put five of the beans in his mouth and swallowed them.

Twenty minutes later, still going strong, the Wildcat was alone by the campfire. The rest of the caravan was scattered through the jungle at safe distances from the bean jazzed cyclone. In the late dawn the Wildcat tamed down.

"Come on heah, boys. Ah don't aim to hurt you." One by one he managed to collect his associates. "Ball Head, how many more of them beans you got?"

"At the village there is a storehouse full."

"How many more is you got wid you?"

"You ate them all," the guide replied.

The Wildcat looked at him. "Let's start fo' de sto'house right now."

II

The evidence in Captain Jack's case showed that he had deliberately gone over the ship's side at Paulliac after having started for the United States under orders and that he had been A. W. O. L. for a good many days be-

fore the dragnet in Paris finally landed him in the guardhouse. The judge advocate lived up to the technical demands of his office and when he finished with Captain Jack that officer's future was festooned with a ball and chain and iron bars.

"Sure to be ten years—maybe twenty. I'm hooked for desertion. Fine chance I have of getting out of this case."

III

Unquestionably the Senator, in affairs of state was the greatest single-handed performer in the known world.

"But my God, Conway, my God!" he barked at his secretary. "What can you do dealin' these damn countries around when you have a female offspring on the verge of delirium tremens because some damn fiancé of an army captain has lost himself in this A. E. F. shuffle. Cable the Adjutant-General. Get the State Department busy. See if you can trail him down and if you can, have him bound hand and foot and delivered at the hotel."

Some hours later, in the Adjutant-General's

office at Washington the wandering boy inquiries were received, and immediately became a part of the great sea of unfinished business. With greater simplicity and more direct frankness the clerk at the State Department filed copies of similar cablegrams which he had received in the bottom of a large wicker wastebasket.

CHAPTER XIX

I

"Ball Head, whut is dem varmints runnin' round on de hills?" The Wildcat, at the head of a marching caravan, pointed toward an open space in the jungle through which rose the great hills that lay about the valley of Ball Head's tribe.

"Goats," the guide replied. "Food for women. They must not be eaten by warriors such as you and me."

The Wildcat thought of Lily. "Once I had a mascot goat. Neveh could figger did she bring me good luck or bad. Good or bad she sho' got drownded when me an' de fire department sunk in de river at St. Sulpice."

But in this instance the Wildcat had the wrong dope. Lily, at the moment, was enjoying the companionship of the crew on board the S.S. "Texan" whose lookout some weeks before had spotted the swimming goat in the Gironde. In the Wildcat's vocabulary, "Lily was doin' noble, eatin' heavy an' sleepin' mos'

all de time." As protégé of the crew of the "Texan" she had a mascot's job what was a job.

II

M. Gromont, Assistant Chef de Service, Bureau of Postes and Telegraphs, anointed himself internally with a couple of quarts of Vang Red and finished his luncheon with an omelette souffle, two pounds of grapes, considerable cheese, and a slug of cognac so old it was feeble.

"Voilà!" That was done. He returned to his desk in the French telegraph office. A fat young woman in a long gingham apron pointed disdainfully at an accumulation of cablegrams which had been received during M. Gromont's absence.

"The money for these?" the assistant chief questioned.

"Locked in the little drawer."

"Very well, my dear. There is a franc. You may go to lunch."

The young woman left the office.

Monsieur Gromont unlocked the little drawer where the money received in payment for the

cablegrams had been put. He transferred these funds to his own pocket after which he shuffled through the messages which had been filed.

"Aha! The Premier of England wishes to know,—immediate response requested. Poincairé and the State Department and the Secret Service and the Associated Press dispatches——" He dumped the entire pile into the waste basket. "Those,—they are worth a franc per hundred kilos as old paper. Otherwise they are worthless."

III

Meanwhile in his prison Captain Jack continued to feel like the devil while two miles away from him in her apartments the Senator's she-girl daughter swore softly in good old United States and clenched a little fist that should have carried a couple of karats of carbon crystal at the very least.

IV

"Ball Head, what's dat smoke?" At the head of a narrow valley the Wildcat's keen eye

saw a wisp of gray against the blue haze of the African afternoon. The guide stared at it intently for a moment.

"It is the village of our tribe," he said to the the Wildcat. He called a command back over the marching line and pointed into the distance. Immediately all the members of the caravan joined in a great uproar.

"Glad to git home," the Wildcat said to himself. "Can't see as I blames 'em. Wisht I could see de smoke of Memphis."

"It is the fires the women have lighted," the guide said to him. "There will be feasting this night." The caravan moved on and late that night in the moonlight they marched between the voodoo posts which marked the edge of the village. Half-naked figures were dancing about the great fire which burned in the center of a group of huts. For an hour or two the Wildcat felt pretty well alone in the pandemonium which reigned about him and then the guide sought him out.

"Yams and the meat of elephant." He gave the Wildcat a clay bowl. "Come and eat."

"Elephant meat I don't crave, but yams sounds good." The Wildcat absorbed his ra-

tions with an enthusiasm prompted by long hours on the trail.

"After you finish," the guide said to them, "there is an enemy worthy of your courage on the trail below here. A man-eating lion has carried off five men from the village above us. He is expected here to-night. Here is a spear. I will show you where to stand so you can kill him. You have claimed to be a great hunter. Thus do the gods afford you amusement."

En route to the place of the kill the Wildcat's bulging eyes fixed upon a ceremony in which a group of forty natives were engaged. "How come dat ruckus over dere, Ball Head?" he inquired.

"A lodge brother is being initiated into the First Order of Hunters," the guide replied. The Wildcat thought of his rendezvous with the man-eating lion. A first-class initiation into a good lodge appealed to him considerably more than offering a jungle beast the opportunity of scattering his insides here and there through the tropical foliage. He was not long in stating his preference.

"What I craves mos' is to join de Lodge."

"Even so," the guide replied. "The lion will

wait." They approached near to the place where the candidate was getting his third degree. A priest whose headdress obscured all of his face except his gleaming eyes was doing the spring plowing in the candidate's chest with a long, keen knife. From the diagonal scars which opened in the flesh behind the blade of the knife, blood flowed.

"Following this, the tribal marks will be cut deep into the face of the candidate," the guide told him.

"Ball Head, give me some more of dem jazz beans. Ah feels triflin'." The guide left him and presently returned with a handful of the invigorating beans.

The Wildcat took one of them. Before it reacted on him he spoke. "Give me the res' of dem beans. I figgers I'll go out an' argue wid de lion. Some night next week I'll join de Lodge. Dese boys seems busy right now."

"As you prefer," the guide said. He handed the Wildcat a great handful of the jazz beans. "Bring your spear and follow me."

At a lonely post in a great cave of darkness where the filtering rays of moonlight served

only to accentuate the gloom about him the Wildcat halted.

"After midnight the prowling beast will probably walk down this trail. One stroke must finish him,—but it is needless to advise a great hunter like yourself."

"Ball Head, leave it to me," the Wildcat said. He put a couple of jazz beans into his mouth. "To-morrow us has lion meat fo' breakfast." The guide left him.

"Mebbe us has lion meat fo' breakfast," the Wildcat amended. He laid the spear down quickly and then in the fading moonlight he stalked straight for the trail which led down river.

Better a thousand times a military finish than one in which a boy's insides would be clawed out by a man-eatin' lion. The Wildcat took another bean.

"Does dese beans hold out, 'at lion will sure have to go some to ketch me." He loped down the trail until his pathway was suddenly obstructed by a huge bulk which writhed and thrashed about in the darkness. The moon showed clear for a moment. It revealed to the Wildcat's bulging eyes a snake something

less than a mile long from whose distended mouth protruded half the body of an antelope.

The Wildcat forgot about the jazz beans in his pocket. He dived deep into the jungle beside the trail and hid his head away from the terror which lay before him.

On the instant that the image of the great snake was blotted from his vision thirty pounds of something active and four-legged dropped from a tree above and landed on the Wildcat's shoulders. "Lawd Gawd, Lady Luck, where at is you?" In his panic everything was forgotten except the clinging menace between his shoulder blades. He galloped down the trail hurdling the boa-constrictor and its prey.

"Jazz beans," he prayed, "stan' by me." The monkey on his back chattered madly to a troupe of its brothers whose eyes gleamed in the jungle beside the galloping Wildcat.

"This one way business is all right," the monkey reflected, "but I don't like to walk back." The Wildcat's passenger leaped from the surging shoulders beneath him.

At dawn, with his tongue hanging out a mile, the Wildcat eased his pace and when a familiar stretch of the river lay before him he paused

long enough to roll a log down the bank. He swam to the log, and early in the afternoon the houses of the African coast town lay before him.

He drifted into the bay and thirty minutes later he was being hauled over the side of a cutter which had swung away from the U. S. Destroyer Graykill. Aboard the destroyer the Wildcat heard English spoken by white men for the first time in many days. It sounded good to his ears.

"Boy, you say dis boat's boun' fo' Bo'deaux?"

"Bordeaux, La Havre and then across the Channel."

"Me, I unloads at Bo'deaux." The Wildcat, in his gratitude at getting some place where white folks was, resolved to accept whatever fate might await him at the hands of the military avengers of Base Section Number 2.

Three days later the Wildcat walked up the stone quay at Bordeaux. He headed for the Alleès de Tourny. "Boun' to meet some boy theh—some boy I knows."

An M. P. hailed him. "Get out of town by

twelve o'clock. She's a closed burg in the afternoon."

Again the old fear of the law surged over him. His feet led him down the Rue St. Catherine and presently between the Midi Station and the railway bridge across the Garonne he flipped a run down rattling little wreck of a freight train. The Wildcat hoped that mebbe he was headed toward Lady Luck. He felt that he was starting out in life with a fresh deal. His capital consisted of a pair of overworked dice, his discharge papers, and a handful of the jazz beans.

Softly to a cadence of flat wheels, high centers and low joints, he sang:

"I kin ride a freight train, I don't pay no fare,
I kin ride a freight train mos' anywhere.
Dat's de reason I'se happy as a bee——
I don't botheh work, work don't botheh me."

CHAPTER XX

I

In the outskirts of Paris, the Wildcat ate himself a jazz bean and got sassy with an M. P. "Mebbe I got mil'tary bearin', boy," he said. "Mebbe dese spiral leggin's is mil'tary. Mebbe I got mil'tary pants, mebbe I looks mil'tary to you, but me an' de Army got a divo'ce a long time——"

Whang! A quick swing with a loaded club tamed the military Wildcat considerably.

"Yessuh! What you says, I does."

"Come on with me and shut up." The M. P. wandered across the freight yards to the telephone booth. He rang headquarters. "A. W. O. L. nigger. I'll hold him until you come."

An hour later, the Wildcat dragged his remains through the portal of the guardhouse in Paris. "One thing sure," he reflected, "I eats. An' that's the best news my stummik's heard for a week."

Mess call sounded. The Wildcat and a long line of victims of his color formed in the bull

pen. Forty feet away was a similar line of white soldiers, and beyond them a small and more select aggregation of spur-wearing officers.

A unit of this Sam Browne group, looking about him, saw the Wildcat.

"Wildcat," he called, "come here!" He turned to the Sergeant of the guard near him. "I want to speak to that nigger a minute."

The Wildcat heard an old familiar voice. "Cap'n, yessuh!" he replied instinctively. He looked around him, and in an instant his eyes fell upon his former commanding officer. Captain Jack looked considerably run down.

"Sho' is proud to see you, Cap'n. Looks like dese triflin' cooks ain't fed you much. You's thin. Lem'me bring you a mess kit f'm de otheh line. Dey feeds heavy over whah us boys is. Cap'n, how come you heah?"

Before Captain Jack could reprimand the Wildcat for his impertinent curiosity, a sergeant of the guard stepped up to the Wildcat and addressed him. "Are you Vitus Marsden?"

"'At's me," the Wildcat said.

"Beat it. We can't hold you. The records

show you were discharged from the Army five weeks ago. Get out!"

"Sahgeant, 'at's what I tol' 'at boy, but he sapped me oveh de head an' brought me heah. Me, I looks mil'tary, but——"

A sudden spark of hope burned in Captain Jack's heart. "When you get out, Wildcat, hunt up Senator Benton and tell him I am here."

"Cap'n, suh, you mean Judge Sam what was in the State House when yo' pappy was gov'neh?"

"I mean Judge Sam. He is in Paris. Find him and tell him I am here."

"Cap'n, yessuh." The Wildcat left the guardhouse one meal ahead of the game. On his way out, he accumulated a pretty fair looking overseas cap and a blouse that was hanging on the wall.

"Ah looks all run down. Dese army clothes belong to some boy 'at kin git more f'm ol' supply sahgeant." Three blocks from the guardhouse the Wildcat festooned the new blouse about his military bearing. He looked at the chevrons on the sleeve of the blouse.

"Ah see I'se a sahgeant again. Wisht I

could git me a coat wid bars on the shouldeh. Sahgeant beats nuthin' though."

II

In front of one of the cafés on the Boulevard the Wildcat forgot that his present object in life was to find the Senator. Inside the café, on a little stage, a pair of languid Jamaica dancers were doing the best they could to agitate the dust under their feet with a soft shoe performance.

At the conclusion of their efforts the Wildcat, still going a million under the surge of the potent jazz bean which he had eaten, gave his itching feet permission to see what they could do. At first his steps synchronized with the cadence of Casey Jones. Presently, having exhausted his repertoire of funeral music, he kicked into some steps in which the spark of life still flamed.

Halfway through this intermediate movement, he crunched his teeth down on one of the jazz beans and then in the resulting tornado of foot work he became conscious of a cyclonic crescendo of applause which swelled about him.

He heard the chink of silver coins falling at his feet. He stopped suddenly and accumulated his winnings which lay thick about him.

"Fifty-five, sixty, eighty, a hund'ed. Hund'ed an' seven!" He made his way grandly to a table at which there was a vacant seat. "Easy come, easy go. Is you got any high-toned drinks?"

The waiter, trained to but one reply, answered him. "Voilà, M'sieur."

Presently the waiter returned with a quart of champagne. At the popping of the cork the Wildcat's chest extended another foot. The proprietor of the café hurried toward him.

"M'sier Nagur, for three dances, afternoon and evening, two hundred francs a day!"

The suddenness of the transaction left the Wildcat a little in doubt. "You mean you pays me two hund'ed francs for burnin' mah foot six times?"

The discussion of the contract was interrupted. Senator Benton stood before the Wildcat. The Wildcat jumped to his feet.

"Judge, suh, 'scuse me fo' sittin' down whilst you is standin'. How is you? Ah ain't seed yo' since befor' de wah begun back in——"

"Come along here." The Senator spoke briefly.

"Judge, yessuh."

The Wildcat left his champagne untouched, left his two hundred francs a day, left the bright lights and followed a voice which he had known. For a little while the Senator questioned him and then in a breath he fixed the Wildcat's immediate future.

"I am here on this Peace Congress business. I want you to take care of me as long as we are in France. I will take you with me when I go back."

"Judge, yessuh. Sho' is gran' to meet up wid yo'. Sho' is proud to take care of yo'. 'Ceptin' when I gits back—Cap'n Jack needs me when I gits back at Memphis."

At the mention of Captain Jack's name, the Senator exhibited a wide-eyed interest. "Son, where do you suppose Captain Jack is now?"

"Last I seed him he was standin' in de mess line oveh at de guardhouse."

"What guardhouse? Here in Paris do you mean?"

"Judge, yessuh. Place whah at de backslid

officehs goes when dey ketches 'em A. W. O. Loose."

The Senator stepped into a taxicab. "Sit on the front seat with the man. Tell him to drive to Paris Headquarters, A. E. F."

"Judge, yessuh." The Wildcat turned to the chauffeur. "Boy, ramble. Headquarters A. E. F."

The chauffer looked at him. "Como?"

"Start quick or Ah'll 'como' you. Me an' de Judge wants to go where at the mil'tary generals is." The chauffeur took a long chance and guessed right.

An hour later an order had issued paroling Captain Jack until his case could come up for rehearing. In brief, as far as his military confinement was concerned, his troubles were over. Leaving headquarters the Wildcat carried the Senator's coat. He fell in three paces behind him and thus they marched to the Senator's hotel.

The next day in the offices of the American delegates the Wildcat was officially installed as the Senator's messenger. In reality he functioned as a continuous vaudeville performance for the Senator and his associates in

the great rooms where big men and little were adjusting the past, present and future states of little nations and big ones.

After a few days there were moments when the Wildcat found time hanging heavily on his hands. He tried in vain to interest the French servants in the business of toying with the risk cubes. "Boy, let me show you." He produced the baby gallopers from his watch pocket.

"You lays down five francs. You speaks to 'em gentle. Yo' agitates 'em. Yo' lets 'em ramble. Whang! an' they reads seven. Yo' wins five francs."

"Zis is not ze same as roulette." The French messenger shrugged his shoulders. "It is not interesting."

"What's dis roulette?"

"Ze wheel wiz numbers. Ze leetle ball spins. You lay five francs. Voilà! Ze five francs is lost."

"You play de losin' games. Leave me de baby cubes an' Lady Luck, I sho' craves action."

For a period of ten days the Wildcat lived a prosaic life in which gambling had no part,

and then one day, no longer able to endure a riskless career he took a piece of chalk and numbered the six blades of the electric fan which whirled above the Senator's desk. It was early morning and except for a small group of minor French employees and himself the offices were deserted.

On the back of the number three blade, opposite the six, the Wildcat, unobserved, stuck a wad of denatured chewing gum. "Ah craves to gum up de game a little. It helps de percentage."

He addressed the audience. "Frogs—rally roun'. You boys claims you knows roulette. Ah'll roulette you some."

He pointed to the fan. "Bets five francs on de six." The bystanders were quick to assimilate this new diversion. . . . The Senator came in at ten o'clock just as the Wildcat was counting his accumulated winnings.

"Run these Frenchmen out of here, son," the Senator ordered. "Tell that major out there in charge of these troops I want to see him a minute."

The Major came in. "The Diplomat and the Great Man will be here any minute now," the

Senator said. "I don't know what military honors they get. That's your business. I want you to do just one thing. Keep the newspapermen away until after this meeting is ended and keep the crowds back. Tell the newspapermen I will see them at noon."

Prompted by an instinct which he could not define, the major commanding the guard of honor saluted this civilian before he left the Senator's office.

Twelve minutes later the two great men had been greeted by the Senator. One of them looked at the Senator and nodded toward the Wildcat.

"This man?" he questioned.

"An ignorant nigger—my personal servant." The Wildcat withdrew to one corner of the room where for a while he watched the two white gentlemen who were speaking in low voices with Senator Sam.

Presently the Wildcat's head drooped and he was asleep.

He was awakened a few moments later by the Senator. "Son if you have any dice with you let me have them. I want your dice or a deck of cards."

The Senator turned to his two associates. "We are men of action. Long winded debates make no hit with me. The quickest way to settle this deadlock is to shake dice for it or cut the cards."

"Agreed." The Diplomat spoke quickly.

In the eyes of the other great man there flashed a twinkle of amused consent. "Impractical," he said. "Especially the dice business. Not, however, that I suspect the Senator. Roulette might——"

The Wildcat handed the Senator the baby gallopers. "Judge, they sevens strong," he whispered. The Senator handed them back to him. "We won't use them. Have you got any cards?"

"Judge, no suh." The Wildcat got the roulette suggestion made by the great man. "On dull days us boys roulettes wid de 'lectric fan."

"Not bad." The Senator pointed to the electric fan above his head. He addressed his two associates. "Six bladed roulette, if you are agreeable." The Diplomat nodded his head. This was a game he understood.

The other smiled. "Quite so," he said. The Senator turned to the Wildcat. "Start this fan

when we tell you to. Shut her off and let her whirl when either of these gentlemen gives you the word."

The Wildcat reached for the switch and stood ready to function as Fate's assistant engineer. "We shall each select a number," the Great Man said. "It is understood that the policies of the winner shall obtain in each debated instance without further argument.

The Senator nodded. "You said it."

"I agree." The Diplomat relaxed. "In the matter of Jugo-Slavia we are at variance on——" he began.

"I play the one-spot," the Great Man interrupted. "Unity of empire."

"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity," quoted the Diplomat. "The great triumvirate. I select number three."

The Wildcat remembered the wad of gum which adhered to one of the blades of the fan. "Fo' a killin', Judge, I advises de six."

"I shall play the six," the Senator announced. "Shoot."

For the space of forty minutes the fate of nations swayed with the swing of the Wildcat's wrist upon the electric switch.

The session ended. The Great Man staggered to his feet and extended his hand. "I congratulate you, Senator. You can report complete success—except in the detail of Mesopotamia."

The Diplomat applied a delicate linen handkerchief to his perspiring brow. He relapsed into his native language.

"Mon Dieu!" he said. "In thirty minutes we have accomplished those things for which the statesmen of the world have struggled in vain throughout a period of five months. Diable! Not once did I win."

The Senator escorted his visitors to the door of his office. As they left the building, long lines of soldiers executed sudden and violent military honors.

Inside the Senator's office the Wildcat looked at Judge Sam. " 'Scuse de compliment, Judge —Ah'll say you cleaned up big whateveh it was."

The Senator smiled at the Wildcat. "Damndest run of luck I had since that poker game in Vicksburg."

"Judge, suh, ol' chewin' gum percentage sho' done noble."

"The what!"

The Wildcat reached up and removed the ball of gum from the blade of the fan.

The Senator fell back in his chair. "When did you load that fan?"

"Judge, suh, me an' Lady Luck had to amputate dese frogs loose from dey triflin' francs. Ah fixed de wheel when——"

Heavily and silently the Judge began to laugh.

"Tell the guard at the door that I will see the newspaper gentlemen now," he said. "Give me that gum."

The Wildcat handed the Senator the little ball of chewing gum. "Judge, yessuh."

Thirty minutes later the press wires revealed the outcome of long months of deliberation on the part of the Peace Congress.

CHAPTER XXI

As the Senator and the Wildcat left the office they were confronted by Captain Jack. "I want to speak with you, sir. Come back to your office with me."

The Senator smiled at the impetuous officer. "Inasmuch as my incapable shoulders are at the moment bowing beneath a load of responsibility greater than Old Man Atlas——"

"Regular orating politician—my troubles would make two loads for Atlas. I'll only keep you a minute."

Followed by the Wildcat, the Senator and Captain Jack entered the Senator's office. The Senator looked at Captain Jack. "Shoot," he said.

Captain Jack took a deep breath. "Your Lady Daughter"—he began, "Your Lady Daughter has just promised to marry me at once. Here in Paris."

The Senator was silent.

"It's up to you to arrange the details—I'm

crazy. I'm getting crazier every second."

The Senator looked long at Captain Jack. Finally he smiled. "No more oats, Jackie? No more wild days?"

"You know the blood, sir," Captain Jack said.

The Senator put his arm about the boy's shoulders. "Happiness be with you. Where do we go from here?" He turned to the Wildcat. "Bring me my coat."

"And after it's over," Captain Jack confided, "the Lady Girl and I are going home where the mockin' birds and magnolias are—and live forever and ever."

The Wildcat could restrain himself no longer. "Cap'n Jack, suh," he said, "when does us leave?"

The Senator turned to him quickly. "Who in hell do you think you belong to?" he said.

The Wildcat faced the place of decision. He hesitated only an instant. "Judge, suh, I 'spect I'se Cap'n Jack's boy."

The Judge looked at him. "What do you mean expectin' round where gentlemen are. I expect I'll kill you to-night."

"Judge, yessuh."

"Let's cut the cards for him. Anyway, he'll be waiting for you when you get back."

The Senator tamed down. "Wildcat, whirl that fan. Pick your number to come, Jackie," he said. "I take six."

Captain Jack looked at the fan. "Three for me. I'm directly opposed to you."

"You shoot the three," the Senator said. "I play the six to win. Wildcat, turn her on." The fan swung for a moment. "Shut her off."

The Senator gazed intently at the whirling blades. "Damn," he said. "The Army has all the luck. The second bet I've lost to-day. Mesopotamia first and now my Wildcat nigger."

Captain Jack smiled. "When you get back, Sir, you can have him."

"I'll go back with you," the Senator said. "Let's get this wedding business over with."

Five days later Captain Jack and the Lady Girl were married in the presence of all the gold braid in Paris. Well in the background in a jungle of potted palms the Wildcat, carrying Captain Jack's motor coat, watched the deal. "Lady Luck," he commented, "you sho' done noble."

II

In the open sea off the mouth of the Gironde the Lady Girl got seasick. Captain Jack and the Senator, resting in the lee of the chart room of the "Texan," sent the Wildcat after their overcoats.

"Nothin' like keepin' warm," the Senator said. "If she had put on her coat when I told her to she never'd been sick."

"They never do what you tell 'em. I should think a man with your experience would know that."

The Senator smiled. "The years will bring you wisdom—at an enormous expense."

The Wildcat appeared with two overcoats. Captain Jack settled down in his. He thrust his hands deep in the side pockets. The fingers of his right hand encountered a pair of dice which he had borrowed from the Wildcat some weeks before. He fished them out and handed them to the Wildcat.

"Son, here's these gallopers of yours," he said. "They sure told me the truth a while back."

The Wildcat reached eagerly for his old fa-

miliar dice. "Cap'n, yessuh. Babies come to yo' manager. Cap'n Jack, suh, kin you 'scuse me for a li'l while?"

The Wildcat went below. He sought out a group of the ship's crew. "Where at's de boy what craved action?" he questioned loudly. "Ah's commandin' twin clickers an' I'se rarin' to go."

One of the sailors looked at him. "Shove off," he said. The Wildcat threw a dollar bill to the deck. "I starts easy. Shoots a dollah."

The sailor covered the bet.

"Alabam'! Shoots two dollars. Shower down yo' money. Dice, stay right. Mississip'! Wham! Shoots fo' dollahs. Us craves de Navy jack. Shoots four dollahs. Any boy. Wham! An' Ah reads seven. Shoots eight dollahs. Shoots——"

"Make it a hundred to keep th' pikers out." A sailor fished a thin roll of bills from the pocket of his blouse. "The Navy's goin' to eat you up."

The Wildcat hesitated only a moment. He explored himself and came to the surface with enough to cover the bet.

"Lady Luck, at yo' feet. Gallopers, Ten-o-

see—Ah reads 'leven. I let's it lay. Shoots two hundred. Army craves de Navy's blood."

"I've got mine." The sailor who had lost turned away from the group. "I was bankin' heavy on that damn mascot. There's the son of a gun now. Sure a dirty day for me when I fished you out of the drink, you four-legged hoodoo."

The Wildcat saw the goat Lily from whom he had parted in the river weeks before near St. Sulpice. "Ah quits," he said. "Dat goat died a long time back. Lily, is you a ghost or is you born again, yo' sho' foun' Lady Luck."

The Wildcat's confidence swung back to the mascot whose official career had so deeply colored the mottled past. "Lily, you devil," he said, "I don't know is you Jonah or ain't you, but us is Memphis boun'—'at's why I'se as happy as a bumble bee—I don' botheh Lady Luck an' she don' botheh me."

CHAPTER XXII

I

"I don't botheh work,
Work don't botheh me.
Me an' Lily's Memphis bound——
Memphis, Ten-o-see."

Several wet acres East of Greenwich Village the Military Wildcat rared upon the bow deck of the "Texan" and faced a civilian future that promised to be as dull as a Jerusalem Easter. A homeward bound quartermaster quartet lined up against the port rail lingered long on the minor chords of "Aloha Oi." The red chevron on the Wildcat's left sleeve voiced its sinister promise of the forthcoming divorce; a divorce that would separate the Wildcat from the business of parading round and round, from his free rations, his free clothes and the various casual advantages of army life in the A. E. F.

Unstable as a whirling dervish in a circulating library the bow of the "Texan" danced up and down and around on the swells which

launched from a distant Atlantic storm. The Wildcat sat down on deck. Lily, his mascot goat, was tethered to a nearby cargo winch. The mascot nibbled delicately on a handful of oil-soaked waste which caught the drip of a leaking stuffing box. The steel deck was slippery and Lily's feet clicked in an irregular effort to stay underneath their owner's center of gravity. The clicking suggested something to the Wildcat. He fished round in his sock and brought out a pair of dice.

A moment later he launched the dice across the deck of the "Texan." "Boys, rally roun'. Lissen at de baby gallopers. Shoots a dollah. De bone remedy cures whut ails you. Any boy. Shoots a dollah."

"Cut it out." A white soldier sprawled full length on the deck gave the Wildcat a little good advice. "If that moral uplifter shark sees you with them bones he'll throw you in the brig or else make four passes and clean you."

The Wildcat put the dice away. "Doggone, I wish we wuz back in de wah." He turned to his mascot. He reached in the side pocket of his blouse and produced a harmonica. The

thin notes of the assembly mingled with the lament of "Aloha Oi."

"Lily—'tenshun! As you wuz. When I calls you to 'tenshun, sway-back yo'se'f."

"Head up!" The Wildcat mumbled to himself: "Cap'n, de Company is formed." Then in louder tones he addressed the mascot. "By de numbers. Front laigs parade res'! Hind laigs, parade res'! Not bofe together. You must think you is twins. Fo' a three striped goat you's de know-leastest I eveh see."

"Blaa," said Lily.

"Silence in de ranks! Front laigs at ease. Hind laigs at res'." Lily sat down on the steel deck.

" 'Tenshun!" Lily stood rigidly on all four feet. From the pocket of his blouse the Wildcat produced a little O. D. cape and a small overseas cap. The cape was decorated with three gold stripes. He set the overseas cap on the goat's bony head and after fishing a fourth gold stripe from his pocket he began to sew it to the goat's cape.

"Goat, listen to me. Ah aims to knock you loose f'm yo' hawns some day. Ah wants to git dis stripe all ready. It's a wound stripe.

Does you aim to follow me roun' afteh we lan's —stan' steady theh! Come to 'tenshun when I'se speakin'—you betteh git mil'tary 'fo' you needs de iodine."

One of the interested spectators, a sergeant, spoke up. "You got no chance in the world of takin' that mascot on shore with you. These sailors think more of that goat than they do of the boat."

"Lily b'longs to me. Me an' dat goat went th'oo de Battle of Bo'deaux together mo' times dan you wuz in de guardhouse." The argument was terminated by the appearance of the uplift gentleman who presently began to speak.

"Thirty minutes from now," he said, "there will be singing on the for'd deck here and I want all you boys to join in. Two of you boys come with me and help carry the song books out." A pair of reluctant volunteers followed the uplifter aft and started down a hatch housing.

The prospect of thirty minutes' freedom from moral supervision reacted quickly upon the Wildcat and half a dozen hardened gamblers of his color. Presently the seven were

leaning far out over the rail at the bow of the "Texan."

"I banks," the Wildcat said. "Odd numbers to win down deep in five dips. Dollah a dip." Seven pairs of eager eyes were directed at the stem of the ship where it cut the surface of the water. The great vessel plunged.

"Nineteen feet," the Wildcat exulted. "Ah wins." The boat's bow lifted and sank again into the swell of the sea. "Nineteen again—an' twenty-one feet. Ah wins three straight! Float, ol' Elephant! Ah wins on seventeen!"

The Wildcat called the turn. "You got yo' feet wet dat time. Get yo' haid undeh now. Come twenty-one." The bow of the boat sank until the twenty-one foot mark on the stem was even with the water surface.

"Ah wins five straight. Pay me now." From each of his six associates the Wildcat collected five dollars. "Dey might stop us gamblin' but dey can't stop de ol' boat rockin'. Sho' is a lucky boat. Headed de right way, too!"

"Shut up! Here comes the songbird."

"Whut day's dis?"

"Prune day. Dey all is. I banks you boys

five dollahs a helpin' on de odd prunes fo' dinneh."

"Us is runnin' short of prunes. I bet we only gets fo' to-day. I takes you, Wilecat." One of the Wildcat's associates accepted the conditions of the prune bet.

"You pays up when de prunes is dished out. Once you eats prunes you ain't 'sponsible fo' whut you does."

The uplifter and his two assistants distributed the song books. The Wildcat looked at his book. "Ah sees de words but whut dey says Ah don' know." When the singing began however the Wildcat's voice was lifted with the rest. Before he burst into song each time he indulged in whispered arrangements with the compact brunet group about him. "Ten dollahs on de odd page."

"You's faded, Wilecat."

"We will now sing 'Whiter Than Snow,'" the uplifter announced. "Page sixty-nine."

"Boy, pay me. I wins," the Wildcat whispered. "Sixty-nine come odd."

After the song the uplifter engaged in a brief lecture. "You have escaped the perils of France," he concluded, "and now you are about

to face the temptations of a great city. I want you boys to pledge yourselves to refrain from games of chance and from gambling from this moment on. Those of you who will do so will raise their right hands."

The entire assemblage signified its resolve to keep free from the evils of gambling. With his hand upraised in promise the Wildcat bowed his head and whispered out of the corner of his mouth, "Five dollahs on de even."

"We will now sing 'O Happy Day,' page forty."

"Page fo'ty. Fo'ty ways to win. Pay me now," the Wildcat whispered quickly. He collected his winnings and sang strenuously, using a text foreign to the printed words. "Ah always win, Ah always win, 'cause me an' my mascot's free f'm sin."

Where sin was concerned Lily was at the moment not quite as pure as the driven snow, having casually indulged in the satin lining of the uplifter's cap which he had removed during the song service. The Wildcat settled for the damage with a quick apology and a savage jerk on the rope about Lily's neck.

"I'll learn you to eat caps. Come to 'tenshun!

Say you is sorry to de white gen'mun, you sacrilegious digester befo' I knocks yo' hawns down yo' th'oat."

"Blaa!" apologized Lily.

CHAPTER XXIII

I

At evening the "Texan" dropped her hook off Governor's Island and swung with the tide until dawn. The Wildcat's Captain sent for him. The Captain was convoyed by a politically conspicuous father-in-law and a blushing bride in whose seasick ears the echoes of the Captain's promise to "Love, Honor and O Baby!" was still ringing.

"We're going over to the Pennsylvania Hotel," the Captain said. "You will have to go on up East River and out to Camp Mills with the rest of the casuals. You have your discharge and special orders from the Base Commander at Bordeaux and all you need is a clearance from the medical officers at Camp Mills. As soon as they turn you loose hunt me up at the Pennsylvania Hotel. I want you to come down to Memphis and take care of the house."

"Cap'n, yessuh." All the Wildcat remembered of his instructions was the word "Memphis." He stood at the ship's rail with

some misgiving and saw his Captain and his Captain's lady and the politically conspicuous senatorial father-in-law embark for the Battery in the launch flying the quarantine flag. His melancholy reverie was interrupted by the bleat of his mascot behind him. He turned to Lily.

"Goat," he said, "you's de next thing. Whut to do about you I don' know."

At dawn the "Texan" nosed to her berth and presently by companies the various organizations began to disembark. The Wildcat, a discharged casual, began to realize his independence and to regret the loss of the yoke of authority which his military neck had sustained. He swallowed heavy a couple of times and finally parked his Adam's apple under the neckband of his O. D. shirt.

"Lily, come here." He led the goat through a hatch housing and down the companionway to the deck below. He walked to his bunk. He cut two short pieces of light cotton rope from the coil which he used to bind his non-military blanket roll. "Lily, 'tenshun!" he hissed. "Front laigs at ease. Hind laigs at res'." The tonneau part of the mascot sat down. The

Wildcat tied Lily's hind legs together tightly. "Don' ask me no questions. As you wuz!" he said. With the other piece of rope he tied the goat's front legs together. His helmet, his mess kit, two or three extra shirts and an assorted accumulation of minor impedimenta were discarded and in their place deep within the roll of six blankets Lily presently formed the nucleus of a compact but quickened bed roll. The Wildcat looped several lengths of rope about the ensemble after it had been sheathed in a waterproof shelter half. He essayed a bleat or two in imitation of Lily's silenced voice. He tried again with greater success, muffling his ventriloquism deep within his throat.

"Does Lily start a ruckus, Ah goes 'Blaa' once or twice and claims its me. Ah'll get dat goat offen de boat no matteh how many folks is lookin'."

Five minutes later in a pier choked with O. D. humanity strenuously milling under a futile wave of military efficiency the Wildcat said "yessum" to a white lady and accepted a cup of coffee and a piece of apple pie. "Ol' coffee sho' is noble. Thank you, ma'am, thank

you. Sho' is noble pie." He engulfed about sixty per cent. of his segment of pie with the first bite. His clamping jaws came together on another problem. He fished the problem out of his mouth with the little finger of the hand carrying his coffee cup. Shining with the reflected rays of a brilliant future, out of the corners of his eyes he saw a little tin horseshoe.

"Mebbe de lady what made de pie et tobacco. Mebbe de lady's boy. Anyway, Lady Luck, here us is."

By mid-afternoon, except for various officials whose duties kept them permanently on the pier, the structure was practically deserted. One of these officials made his way toward the Wildcat who was seated against the landward wall of the pier-shed near the door. "What outfit do you belong to?" the brass button man asked.

"Cap'n, I'se a casual," the Wildcat returned. "Ah got my discharge an' de red stripe in Bo'deaux."

"What are you doing around here?"

"Me, I just landed off de boat."

"You say you got your discharge in Bordeaux?"

"Cap'n, yessuh."

"Let me see it."

The Wildcat fished around in his pocket and produced several papers which the officers in Bordeaux had advised him to retain. The man with the brass buttons looked them over.

"Get out of here," he said. "You've finished with the army a long time back."

"Cap'n, yessuh."

The Wildcat picked up his blanket roll and started for the door. From the depths of the roll there came a faint bleat. The brass button man looked at him suspiciously. "Hold on. What you got there?"

"Cap'n, suh, nuthin'. I was just crowin' in mah th'oat, like dis." The Wildcat essayed a couple of "Blaas" to camouflage the vociferous Lily. His efforts convinced the brass button man but they also excited the concealed cargo. The Wildcat walked through the door of the pier-shed blaa-ing himself along at something less than sixty miles an hour. Once he reached his arm surreptitiously about the blanket roll and gave it a terrible squeeze but instead of silencing Lily it served only to accentuate her plaintive tones.

"Damndest crazy nigger I ever saw." The brass buttons turned and resumed his official indolence.

II

Once clear of the pier-shed the Wildcat reached into the bundle. "For two jitneys and a picayune Ah'd choke you to death," he hissed. "Me goin' 'blaa' like a fool. Come up here wid me." In the seclusion of an angle formed by a billboard and a brick wall the Wildcat opened the end of his blanket roll and dragged the mascot into the light of the fading day. He removed the cords fore and aft which bound Lily's feet. "Stan' up there!"

He produced the tin horseshoe which he had retrieved from the apple pie and held it before Lily's nose. "Goat, does you see dat? Lady Luck is trailin' us an' 'less you acts noble from now on Ah aims to th'o you in de ocean. Wid dis hoss shoe Ah don' need you no longeh."

Lily took three short steps with her head down and landed violently on the Wildcat's shins. She hit him again squarely from behind as he was rising to his feet. She charged the third time and the Wildcat rolled to one

side in an endeavor to escape the four-legged tornado. Lily put considerable English on herself. Her horns established contact with that area on the Wildcat's cranium which he scratched when he did not know about anything.

"Kamerad!" he yelled. "You wins. Ca'm yo'se'f, goat. Ah quits. Come on uptown an' I'll buy you some fancy grub. I neveh aimed not to need you. Ah needs you all de time. You is all de luck I'se got."

Half an hour later Lily and the Wildcat got on the train at the Long Island depot, dived across East River and came to the surface in the Pennsylvania Station. When darkness fell it found the pair wandering around Union Square. "Us camps heah fo' de night, Lily," the Wildcat said. He unrolled his bed roll and was about to go into temporary camp when a policeman moved him out.

Down the street he saw an electric sign. He asked a white gentleman a question. "Cap'n, suh, kin yo' tell us whah at we kin git some grub?"

The stranger thus addressed glanced about him and saw the electric sign. "There is a

restaurant over there—Childs Restaurant," he said.

"Cap'n, thank you, suh. Lily, come on. You's de same as a child. Me, I aims to wrap myse'f roun' a man-size ration."

Two minutes later he was again on the street, this time headed toward the Bowery. "Get out of here with that four-legged bouquet."

A few blocks down the Bowery the Wildcat saw a group of negroes enter a saloon. "Us'll hit de free lunch—c'm on, Lily," he said. He shifted his military bearing for the hard boiled swagger of the river boat rouster. He reached into his pocket and produced the Distinguished Service Cross and the Croix de Guerre which had been given him in France. He pinned these on his blouse and entered the saloon.

The first roll of his eyes took in the detail of four busy card tables, a crap game, a forty-foot bar and a prosperous looking free lunch counter. He started for the lunch.

For the first five minutes nobody paid any attention to him. Then a beetle-browed king of spades voiced a remonstrance. "How about

it, soldier? You gonna come across for next month's board before you eats it or not?"

The Wildcat mumbled out of the corner of his busy jaws. "Ca'm yo'se'f, man. Ah aims to nutrify mah'se'f first. I'll pay de boa'd." He handed Lily three segments of energetic cheese. Lily and the cheese grappled in a catch-as-catch-can smell contest, the outcome of which left the goat victorious.

"Run the big smell out of here," the bartender ordered.

The Wildcat looked sideways at him. "Boy, don't git hard with me. Lily, 'tenshun! At ease! Hind laigs at ease! Sit dere whilst Ah gits a drink." The Wildcat turned to the bar. "Bust me open a bottle of champagne, boy."

A group at one end of the card tables smiled at the military goat. In the bartender's mind the champagne order affected the Wildcat's status to a considerable degree. "Payroll nigger," he thought to himself. "Can't sell anybody in uniform nothing," he said.

"Gimme a ovehcoat," the Wildcat countered. "I'se out of de army. I'se got mah red stripe. Gimme two bottles of 'spensive champagne."

He produced a roll of bills as big as his wrist.

Bam! The first cork hit the ceiling. "Gimme de bottle. Ah drinks out of de bottle."

A stranger drifted casually to the bar. "Did you get across, Buddy?" he asked the Wildcat.

The Wildcat set the champagne bottle down. "Across what, podneh?"

"Was you in France?"

The Wildcat snorted. "I'll say us wuz. Ah wuz in de first battle, de las' battle and everything in between. Fust gallop outen de box I rounds me up fo'ty Germans—dey gimme dis fo' dat." He pointed to the Croix de Guerre.

"You say you're out of the army now?"

"Sho' is. Got mah red stripe. Special discha'ge."

Another stranger drifted into the conversation. "Always go loaded for bear, I suppose?"

"Sho' do. I aims to pack a li'l equalizer all de time."

"Got one with you now?"

"Restin' heavy on mah laig. She talks free an' easy when de time comes."

"Them new automatics sure is nice guns. Lemme see it?" the second stranger addressed the Wildcat. The Wildcat produced a .45

Service automatic which he had salvaged in France. The second stranger threw back the lapel of his coat. "You are under arrest for carrying concealed weapons, boy. Come with me." He displayed a large nickel-plated star. "It's against the laws of this State. Probably cost you a thousand dollar fine or a year in jail."

The Wildcat's eyes rolled violently. The first stranger spoke quickly. "Wait a minute, Al," he said. "Come here a minute, boy." He led the Wildcat a little apart. "I can fix it with that man for one hundred dollars." A moment later the Wildcat had transferred one hundred dollars of his roll to the stranger.

"All I says is git him out of here. I aims to stay. Sho' is much 'bliged to you, podneh. Get dat man away f'm heah." A moment later the Wildcat again breathed the air of freedom. "Gimme some gin," he said to the bartender.

He absorbed three or four slugs of gin. He walked over to the crap table. "Ah craves action wid de bones. Shoots ten dollahs." A pair of swarthy card players at one of the tables accommodated the Wildcat.

"You like-a to tak-a da bones on a promenade?"

"Ten dollahs says so," the Wildcat replied. He fished the dice out of his sock. "Shower down yo' money, boy."

The younger Italian covered the bet. "Roll 'em," he said.

The Wildcat warmed the dice against his leg for an instant and then threw them across the green cloth. They battered sharply against the barrier at the edge of the table.

"Ah reads seven. Shoots twenty dollahs."

"An' a five side bet," the other stranger proposed. "You're faded."

"Wham! Ah reads eleven. Ah lets it lay. Shoots fifty dollahs."

"Twenty-five dollars is beeg enough. Twenty-five dollars limit."

The Wildcat picked up the rest of his winnings and left twenty-five dollars on the table. The Italian laid down a new looking fifty-dollar bill and picked up the Wildcat's crumpled currency. "Let 'em roll," he said.

In the course of the next thirty minutes the Wildcat had accumulated nearly a thousand dollars in new crisp bills from the Italian vic-

tims of hard luck. Time after time he had thrown down the limit bet of twenty-five peeled from the roll of bills which he had carried from Bordeaux. When the Wildcat's original roll had dwindled to twenty or thirty dollars the Italians displayed strenuous emotions.

"I quit-a da game. Da nigger for luck."

The Wildcat shifted his roll of new fifty dollar bills deep into his pocket. "Dat's all, white boy. Nex' lesson I learns you som'thin' new." He turned to Lily, who was still at rest on her hind legs over behind the lunch counter.

"Lily, 'tenshun!" he said. The goat stood upright. "Us travels." A moment later, having forgot his blankets, the Wildcat and his mascot left the saloon.

"Ah don' botheh work,
Work don' botheh me,
You loses money on de two an' th'ee.
Warmin' up yo' carcass wid a slug o' gin,
Ramble 'em fo' Lady Luck,
You's boun' to win."

CHAPTER XXIV

I

Twenty minutes after the Wildcat left the saloon the gambling tables were raided. Among the fish in the jail-bound dragnet were two crap-shooting Italians who had contributed so many crisp new fifty dollar bills to the Wildcat's luck.

In the wake of the strolling Wildcat was a flashily dressed boy of the Wildcat's color. Farther down the Bowery this individual addressed the Wildcat. "Boy, ain't I seed you some place?" The Wildcat stopped and looked at the stranger.

"I 'spects so. Me an' Lily's been roun' consid'able."

"Seems like I met up wid you in France."

"Mebbe so," the Wildcat conceded.

"Them wuz de good ol' days," the stranger said. "Wisht I could get me back in a ol' unifohm an' be an army man again. Nuthin' to do but shoot Germans an' sleep."

"Wisht Ah could git me into some fancy

clo'es wid flappin' laigs to de pants," the Wildcat said. "Does I git hot I itch myse'f sick in dese leggins. Dat's why de Cap'ns weah spurs so dey can scratch th'oo de leggin's."

"You-all feel agreeable to hibernate a dram inside yo' constitution—dram of gin or liquor?"

"Keer if Ah does," the Wildcat accepted. "Whah at does us go?"

In a nearby saloon the Wildcat absorbed three heavy drinks of gin. "Wham!" he said as he set his third empty glass down. "Boy, I sho' 'steems them clothes of yours high."

"Podneh, bein's as it's you I don't mind tradin'. Us is about de same build."

"You trade dat raiment fo' dese heah common army clo'es!"

"Bein' as its you," the stranger conceded.

Twenty minutes later the exchange had been effected. The Wildcat began to prance. "Head roun' heah, Lily," he said. "Ah'll learn you! Us is quality."

The stranger looked at him.

"I got a good automobeel I'll sell cheap. You ought to have a cah for seein' N'Yawk."

The Wildcat thought of his winnings. "How much?" he said.

"I got a high grade speedster up de street here you can have fo' five hund'ed dollahs."

"Lemme have a look." They walked up the street. The stranger looked intently at each automobile which they passed. He finally pointed to a low blue roadster. "Dat's de car."

The Wildcat reached for his roll of bills. "Here's de money." He counted out ten of the fifty dollar bills and gave them to the stranger. "Sho' is much 'bliged. Ah sho' did some rough drivin' in France. Git up in de seat, Lily. Roads heah sho' is noble, podneh. So long!" With Lily beside him he edged into the traffic.

The stranger on the curb counted the ten fifty-dollar bills and put them in his pocket. "I'll say I had a hell of a time findin' a car that wasn't locked up," he said.

At four o'clock that morning three miles uptown the Wildcat hauled in beside the curb and settled himself comfortably for a sleep. He threw his arm about the mascot. Lily gave a plaintive bleat and presently the pair were sleeping. At five o'clock a policeman accompanied by a man in plain clothes walked over to the car. The policeman glanced at a slip

of paper in his hand and at the license number on the car. "It's all right, Jerry," he said to his companion, "I'll herd him in."

"Better limber up the gat when you wake him up. He might be a bad one," his companion advised. The policeman reached around and produced his revolver. He stepped over to the slumbering Wildcat and tapped him on the shoulder. Thereafter for five minutes the Wildcat batted his eyes and faced a gray world.

"Cap'n, how come?"

"Drive to the station. You birds is getting thick and sassy. Turn to the left here. Don't let me hear no more out of youse. Tell it to the sergeant." The officer escorted the Wildcat through the portals of an ugly looking building.

"Lady Luck, where at is you?" the Wildcat said. Lily trailed along behind him. Presently the party stood before the bar of approximate justice. "I found this bird in the automobile he stole from Mr. Burke. Luggin' a gat, too."

"Slough him, Danny, for the afternoon session," the desk sergeant ordered.

The Wildcat knew a jail when he saw it. "Cap'n, suh, lemme take de mascot wid me?" he asked.

"Get him to hell out of here," the desk sergeant said. After turning over his money to the custodian the Wildcat presently found himself and Lily in the bullpen. "Lady Luck, doggone you heah us is." Lily bleated faintly. "Shut up, you debbil, 'fore Ah knocks yo' whiskehs off. Wisht I wuz in Memphis. Wisht ol' Cap'n wuz heah. Wisht Ah knowed where at Cap'n said he wuz."

He looked about him searching for a friendly face. He found none, but three cages to the left of him he saw the two Italians from whom he had won the wealth which had bought his downfall. He spent a long morning in jail. At two o'clock he was haled into court for a preliminary hearing.

"Name's Vitus Marsden. Dey calls me de Mil'tary Wildcat 'count Ah wuz sergeant in de Fust Service Battalion, A. E. F., in France. . . . Me, Ah comes f'm Memphis, Ten-o-see. Ah's Cap'n Jack Marshall's boy by rights."

"How long were you overseas?" the judge asked.

"Who, me? Judge, Ah wuz over dah a long time, 'bout two yeahs too long. Ah went oveh when de wah wuz knee high to a toad. Me an' Lily come back afteh de Piece Conflooence stahted to figgeh out who'd git de bigges' piece."

"Who was Lily?" the judge asked.

"Gin'ral, suh, Lily's de mascot I carries roun' fo' luck."

"How'd you happen to steal that automobile?"

"Didn't steal no automobeel. Boy asked me did Ah want some gin an' Ah cumulated me about fo' drinks an' afteh dat I traded clo'es wid de boy. Got dis heah suit fo' mah soldier clo'es. Pretty soon he 'lowed Ah ought to have a automobeel to go wid all de fancy clo'es. He sold me his'n."

"What did you pay him for it?"

"Gin'ral, suh, Ah give de boy five hund'ed dollahs. Sho' looked like a good cah."

"Where did you get the money?"

"Ol' Gin'ral in France paid me de money fo' savin' de Navy—part of it. De res' I 'cumulates wid de bones las' nigh 'fore de ruckus stahted."

"Where did you get those two medals that were in your pocket?"

"Ol' gin'ral give me one fo' fetchin' fo'ty Germans in de fust battle us boys fought. French gin'ral give me de otheh one foh de same thing."

In the Judge's mind there grew a strong inclination toward leniency, but there were too many newspaper reporters present for him to reflect the unstrained quality of mercy.

"Three months or five hundred dollars," he pronounced.

The Wildcat scratched his head. "Don't know is us got dat much, Gin'ral."

The Judge called the clerk of the court. "How much money was on this prisoner when he was arrested?"

The clerk summoned the property custodian and the Wildcat's possessions were presently brought into court. The Croix de Guerre, the Distinguished Service Cross, the .45 caliber automatic, a roll of bills and two overworked dice were laid in front of the Judge. He handed the roll of bills to the Wildcat. "How much money have you here?"

The Wildcat began the laborious process of

counting his money. "Near as I kin figger, Gin'ral, it looks like six hund'ed dollahs."

"Three months or five hundred dollars," the Judge repeated.

"You mean Ah gits loose for five hund'ed dollahs?"

"That's it."

The Wildcat counted out ten fifty dollar bills and handed them to the Judge. "Gin'ral, Ah craves to git loose," he said. "Heah's de money."

"Prisoner discharged," the Judge said.

The clerk handed the Wildcat his dice, the Croix de Guerre and Distinguished Service Cross. "We keep this gat," he said, pointing to the automatic.

The Judge handed the clerk the ten fifty dollar bills.

"Gin'ral's, suh, is dat all?" the Wildcat asked.

"That's all," a uniformed officer told him. "Beat it!"

The Wildcat turned to leave the courtroom. As he did so the clerk got up hastily and walked over to the Judge. He whispered something

in the Judge's ear and laid the ten bills in front of that dignitary.

"Hold that man!" the Judge called. The policeman at the door grabbed the Wildcat. "Bring him back here." The Judge's face was suddenly sinister with its repressed emotion.

"Where did you get that money? It's phoney—counterfeit. Throw him back into the pen," he ordered.

The Wildcat talked fast. "Gin'ral, Ah don' know nuthin' 'bout de money 'ceptin' I won it offen de two boys whut yo' got in de bullpen dis mawnin'—two dark-colored white boys. Ah wuz shootin' craps wid dem boys in a saloon las' night an' dey changed mah money foh me fast as Ah won it."

"Take him back to the pen," the judge repeated. He turned to the captain of detectives. "Hunt up that pair this negro speaks about. This is that phoney Federal Reserve stuff that's been kicking round for the last three months."

Ten minutes later the Wildcat was again languishing back of the bars. During the course of the afternoon hope gasped a few

times and breathed its last. "Lady Luck," he said, "doggone you, where at is you hid?"

II

Lady Luck, however, was not so far away. Early in the evening the Wildcat was again summoned from his place of confinement. He was called upon to identify the two Italians from whom he had obtained the fifty dollar bills. After this brief process was accomplished he was released. "Your fine is remanded," the desk sergeant told him. "We needed those two vag wops you identified and needed 'em bad for launching the queer fifty paper."

"Cap'n, yessuh. Whut does I do now?"

"Beat it. Git to hell out of here quick."

"Cap'n, yessuh." Thirty seconds later the Wildcat and Lily, closely followed by the invisible Lady Luck, were again on the streets of New York.

"Doggone!" the Wildcat repeated. "Wisht Ah wuz in Memphis. Wish't ol' Cap'n wuz heah. Ah dunno where at kin he be."

The Wildcat's Captain was at the moment

boarding a train in the Pennsylvania Station which would take him to San Francisco en route to Siberia, to which military fate he had been ordered that afternoon by the relentless telegraphic hand of superior military authority. With him he carried his heavy heart, a tearful bride and the futile promises of a Senatorial father-in-law to get him out of the army or else bust Washington wide open. Fate's third alternative, that of failure, was not in the Senator's lexicon. The Senator had a lot to learn about the favors of royalty in spite of his wide political experience.

At the Wildcat's heels Lily bleated faintly. "Shut up!" the Wildcat said. "You ain't no hungrier dan whut Ah is. Was us in Memphis Ah'd fill you so full of hot catfish you couldn't walk."

Somewhere in the association of food and travel the Wildcat's infantile mentality developed a kitchen on wheels. "Hot dam!" he said. "Ah gits me a job on de train waitin' on de table an' when de white gentlemen is th'oo us eats an' travels at de same time." He stopped the first pedestrian he encountered. "Cap'n, suh," he said, "kin you all tell me where

at de man is whut hires eatin' car han's?"

"What hires what?"

"What hires de boys dat waits on table on trains."

The man looked at him. "Look it up in the telephone book," he said.

"Cap'n, suh, Ah ain't learned to read yit. Dey tried to teach us boys in de army but we wuz too busy killin' Germans to read much." The man looked at him. "Were you in the army?"

"Yessuh, two years in France, right from de staht."

"Come on with me." He led the Wildcat to a drugstore where he consulted a telephone directory and presently told him explicitly how to get to the office of the superintendent of dining car service. "Is that clear?" he asked.

"Cap'n, no suh. Ah gits all mixed up wid dese streets. Ah 'spec Ah's de best forgetter whut is."

"Hell," the stranger said. "Come with me." The stranger who had been a Red Cross man in France and who was therefore trained in the gentle business of doing unrewarded favors and kind things for other people, gave the

Wildcat thirty minutes of his time. Presently the pair stood before a door whose legend indicated that the superintendent of dining car service had his office just beyond its panels.

The Wildcat's guide tried the door. It was locked. He called to a janitor who was busy with a vacuum cleaning snake down a long corridor. "Anybody on duty here at night?"

"Nine o'clock to-morrow morning," the janitor called back.

"This is the place. The man won't be here until nine o'clock to-morrow morning."

"Gin'ral, thank you. Me an' Lily'll wait fo' him."

The stranger smiled. "Good-by. Good luck, boy."

"Gin'ral, yessuh. Us sho' is much 'bliged to yo'."

Five minutes later the janitor put the Wildcat and his mascot out of the building. They spent the night on the steps of it.

CHAPTER XXV

I

The next morning at nine o'clock the Wildcat and Lily faced the gentleman in whose hands were the gustatory destinies of the people who travel Westward over the line which carries the dining cars under his supervision.

"Any experience as a waiter?"

"Cap'n, yessuh. Ah took care of white gentlemen off an' on ten yeahs since Ah wuz a boy."

"Number 54 Westbound. 10:20." The superintendent of dining car service called a boy. "Take this man down the yard. He goes out on 54 with Stevens. Bus boy. Tell Stevens if he is a live one to give him a tray."

The boy turned to the Wildcat. "Come on with me." Out in the hall the Wildcat accumulated Lily who had been giving the ozone in the building a run for its money.

"Is that your goat?" the boy said.

"Dat's mah mascot. Where at I goes he follows. Come 'long heah, Lily."

"He'll have a hell of a time following you now."

"'At goat kin make sixty miles a hour back of any steam engine whateveh pulled a train."

"Sure has got the strength if smell counts," the boy said.

They made their way to the yards where, on a side track, lay an eighty-foot diner. The boy boarded the car and knocked on the door of the kitchen. The negro chef opened the door. "Tell Stevens when he comes down the boss says this man goes out on the Westbound run." He turned to the Wildcat. "This is the chef. He will wise you up."

The Wildcat faced a hardboiled member of his own race. "Get in here," the chef said. "I don't want no scenery cooks on this run. Is you got a bottle with you? Staht in shinin' up that silver."

"Boy, take care o' dis goat ontil Ah goes uptown a minute an' Ah'll have a bottle."

"Don't allow no goats on heah," the chef said.

The Wildcat looked at him. "Two full quarts—Ol' Squareface?"

"Hurry up," the chef conceded. "I'll take care of de goat."

At ten twenty the Wildcat pulled out of the terminal. From then until the first call for lunch he was busy learning things. The Wildcat learned a good deal every mile the train traveled and there are more than three thousand miles between New York and San Francisco.

In the Chicago yards the dining-car conductor handed a service wire to the chef, who read it and passed it on to his assistants. "No res' fo' de weary," he complained. "Us makes another emergency run to 'Frisco wid dis cah. We leaves on de Overland at 7:10 to-night. Couple o' you boys help wid de ice an' p'visions when de time comes."

In the afternoon, before the first dinner call, three days west of Chicago the chef rounded up his waiters. "Go strong on the entrées," he said. "Play up the pork tenderloins. If you don't we got to throw 'em overboard. When they calls for club steaks advise against 'em. I ain't got none left. Play de oysters strong. Dey's weakenin'."

The Wildcat drew four army officers at his

table. Two of these gentlemen carried stars on their shoulders. The other two were festooned with eagles. "Boy, what you got that's good?" one of the colonels asked.

"Gin'ral, suh, Ah'se got some oysters out there what claims to be prize winners. De head chef just tol' me confidential 'at he had some lovely entrails on de fiah."

"Entrails!" A heavy set general opposite the colonel looked serious and covered his lips with three fingers of his hand. "Air is close in here," he said.

The colonel to whom the Wildcat had made recommendations smiled a crooked smile. "Lug in some entrails and any other chow you've got. It's all a gamble anyhow."

"Gin'ral, yessuh. Would you crave dem filly mignons aveck champions?"

"What's that?"

"Ah don' jus' know. They stews up some vegetables wid' okra an' some swell steaks off a champion racin' filly, mebbe. Since de wah us eats horse meat an'——"

"What's that damnable smell?" the heavy-set general interrupted. "Close in here."

"Gin'ral, Ah don' know. Might be some of

dem mountain varmints we run over. They smell strong every time de wheels go roun,' an' de way we'se travelin' now de wheels sho' is goin' roun'. Dey sort of trails out afteh de train hits 'em."

"That's all. Go out in the kitchen and bring us something to eat. Bring us some coffee first."

"Gin'ral, yessuh." The Wildcat headed for the kitchen.

"Smells to me like plain goat," the general said.

"Page the indoor English mutton chop," one of the colonels recommended. He called the dining car conductor. "Open a ventilator or two. Don't you think it would be a good idea? This car's been smelling like a circus train ever since we got on board."

The dining car conductor reflected that it looked like a circus ever since the heavy set generals and their skinny aides boarded the train. He did not voice his reflections. "It is close in here," he said.

"Damn close," the heavy-set general echoed. "Smells like goat to me."

"Prob'ly we run oveh one of dese rocky

mountain goats or somethin' gin'ral." The Wildcat returned presently lugging several thousand pounds of rations. He shuffled the deck and dealt the rations promiscuously. The heavy-set general regarded the food before him with a fishy eye. "Take it away and bring me some coffee," he said. Several feet of his chest heaved slightly. "Bring me some soup."

"Gin'ral, suh, on de curves we don' serve no soup. We won't hit de soup track for quite awhile yit. Dis railroad's got a soup track in it every so often an' on dese curves us boys would drown ourse'fs convoyin' soup out. 'Spect we'd hahdly git out of de kitchen wid it afore somethin' would wreck us."

The Wildcat turned to the other general. "Gin'ral, Ah thought mebbe you'd like some chicken. It ain't on de bill but we run oveh it down de yards de las' stop. De chef got it fo' himse'f. Ah made th'ee passes through wid de gallopers an won it offen him."

One of the colonels addressed his three companions. "Gentlemen, if it is all the same to you, I think I will go back in the car. Boy," he said grandly to the Wildcat, "have some ham sandwiches sent back."

"Gin'ral, yessuh. Dey ain't no ham—us boys et it."

"Damndest road I ever saw," the heavy set general complained.

"Ain't it de truf'?" the Wildcat agreed. "Wunst I gits home, Gin'ral, Ah's done. You an' me bofe." Two minutes later four disgruntled army officers left the dining car after having dined on overworked coffee and a quadrant of sick looking casaba melon. "Damndest service in the world," the ranking officer exclaimed.

"That's what that Government supervision does," one of his companions suggested. "What can you expect?"

II

An hour later after the dining car had cleared and everything was quiet except for a crap game among the cooks and waiters at the forward end the Wildcat set one table and did a few things with the fire in the kitchen.

He stuck his head out of the kitchen and called to the chef in charge of the car. "Come

here a minute. A drink of gin says it wants to see you."

The chef got up at his subordinate's invitation and joined the Wildcat in the kitchen.

"Boy," the Wildcat said, "I'se been thinkin' 'bout them fo' soldier men what didn't git no suppeh much. S'pose you an' me heads in an' sees whut kin we do? You owes me fo' dollahs credit Ah lent you. Ah'll let it go until to-morrow if you pitch in and he'p me. 'Longside of dat you gits two drinks of gin out of my private bottle."

"Le's go!" the chef agreed. The kitchen for a little while became the scene of whirlwind activity.

Presently the Wildcat made his way back through the train until he came upon the four officers. "Gentlemen, suh," he said. "Yo' private dinneh is served."

The heavy-set general looked at him. "What!"

"Ah seed you didn't eat much dinneh, Gin'ral, so afteh de common folks lef', me an' de boy fixed up a snack fo' you all."

"Great gad!" The General got to his feet. "Come here, you fellows." With his three com-

panions, led by the Wildcat, he went forward to the diner. The battle opened with cocktails that had the authority all the way from the bottoms of the crystal glasses to the tops of their frozen edges. It waged for an hour with an intensity which left the four officers gorged with the best food they had tasted for many days, cooked as only a chef of the South could cook it.

After the smoke of the conflict had been replaced by that of four perfect cigars the heavy set General leaned back and went to sleep for thirty seconds. He awoke with a little start. "My God, I thought I was in heaven." He called to the Wildcat. "Boy," he said, "this is what I'd call an emergency miracle." He held out two banknotes toward the Wildcat. "Give one of these to the chef and keep the other for yourself."

"Gin'ral, suh, Ah'll give de chef his but I wuz a soldier in de A. E. F. myse'f. Dat's all right. Ah's glad to serve you, suh."

"Where were you a soldier?"

"Gin'ral, all oveh France. Ah wuz oveh dere first an' came near bein' de las' man back." He reached in his pocket. "One of de

gin'rals give me dis heah cross fo' ketchin' fo'ty Germans an' de French gin'ral give me de otheh cross. Ah 'spect if dey let me keep at it Ah'd ketched all de Germans whut wuz."

For five minutes the Wildcat entertained the four officers with a sketch of his activities in the A. E. F.

The heavy-set general quit laughing long enough to wipe the tears out of his eyes. "Boy," he said, "if you are ever in San Francisco and want anything, hunt me up."

"Gin'ral, yessuh. Ah needs some easy shoes," the Wildcat said. He came to attention and saluted the best he knew how, which was one hundred per cent of perfection. The four officers left the car.

"What I want to know is, how did they get rid of the smell so quick?" one of the generals said as he walked through the vestibule.

The Wildcat, handing the banknote to the chef, unconsciously answered the general's query. "You smells niggers an' you smells goats, single, but mix 'em up an' you don' smell neither one—much."

CHAPTER XXVI

I

The Wildcat, having fed Lily, was on his hands and knees on the floor of the car, teaching the rest of the waiters a few of the details of the business of making sevens and elevens bring home the bacon. "Fade me, fiel' han's. Fade me. To-morr's de las' day fo' revenge. Us needs action to-night."

By midnight he was custodian of all the personal cash on the car and forty dollars of that belonging to the company.

At Oakland the surplus of skilled dining car waiters divorced the Wildcat from his latest job. Cast upon the flinty bosom of an ungrateful world, he stood casually regarding the bright lights of the city. "Which way's de main part of town?" he asked a man.

"Catch that boat," the man said. "She leaves in two minutes."

Leading Lily, the Wildcat boarded one of the Bay ferries which was presently headed for San Francisco.

Midway across the Bay, off Goat Island, the Wildcat turned to a fellow passenger. "Whah at's dis boat headed fo'?"

The passenger looked at him. "That's France right across the Bay. We just now passed Goat Island."

The Wildcat thought the stranger was misinformed on the France deal but according to the Wildcat's experience in all probability the white man spoke the truth. He was considerably worried until he landed a few minutes later in San Francisco and asked five or six people successively where at he was.

"Lily, come on heah!" he commanded. The Wildcat and his mascot headed up Market Street. It took him half a day to get to the end of this street. He faced Twin Peaks. "Way mah feet feels Ah don' crave to climb no mountains." He turned round and headed toward the Bay. In the course of his promenade going and coming on Market Street he and Lily consumed between five and ten tons of assorted peanuts and bananas. Again in the heart of town his fancy leaned strong toward the business of dolling himself up externally. Financially speaking, he was as strong as the

aroma which radiated from the mascot he was leading.

Presently he emerged from a clothing store which had sold him a hat, a pair of shoes and everything in between. He and Lily continued marchin' round an' round. Thirty minutes later his feet began to hurt him. He sat down on the curb and took off his shoes and continued to march barefooted. "Wisht Ah had me a pair of army shoes." He resolved to hunt up his heavy-set military general friend and git a pair of old army shoes from him.

He confronted a gentleman indulging in a siesta in Union Square. "Whah at does de soldiers live in dis town?"

The man pointed to a Geary Street car. "Catch that 'D' car. It will take you out to the Presidio where the soldiers are."

Half an hour later the Wildcat and Lily were wandering round the Presidio hunting for the heavy-set general. In the many hundreds of acres comprising the Presidio there is plenty of room in which to hunt a heavy-set general. At early evening the Wildcat was still going round and round without having picked up the scent. He and Lily took Retreat where it

caught them. With the boom of the gun the Wildcat decided to get back downtown. He started for the car. Waiting on the platform in the center of a group of army officers was a gentleman whose presence struck at the roots of the Wildcat's being. Barefooted, dragging Lily as fast as the reluctant mascot would travel, the Wildcat raced toward this man.

"Cap'n Jack," he called. "Heah us is!"

The Wildcat's Captain faced his old associate. "How in hell did you get here? Come on here with that goat."

Captain Jack, the Wildcat and Lily boarded the car. "If I catch you leavin' me again I'll kill you," the Captain said.

"Cap'n Jack, yessuh. Whah at is us gwine now?"

Captain Jack's face was suddenly overcast with a mask of heavy melancholy.

"Siberia," he said slowly.

"When does us staht?"

"Shut up!"

"Cap'n, yessuh."

On the way downtown to the hotel where Captain Jack's tearful bride awaited him he told the Wildcat of the sudden turn of affairs

which had condemned him to this new and awful fate.

Without his Captain enlarging upon the question, the Wildcat sensed the dismal business that was flooding his Captain's heart. "Cap'n, suh, mebbe it ain't so bad. Me an' Lily'll be there, an' . . ."

"Shut up!"

"Cap'n, yessuh."

II

At six o'clock the next morning the Wildcat faced a day which included considerable ramblin' round in tight shoes. He resolved to play the Presidio bet once more in an effort to accumulate some army shoes for himself. "Cap'n Jack ain't gwine to git up until ten o'clock. Me, Ah gets back long befo' dat."

He headed again for the Presidio.

The first officer he encountered was the heavy-set general. The Wildcat explained the necessity for easy shoes. "Me an' Cap'n Jack goes oveh to Siberia wid de army dis aftehnoon. Cap'n Jack's wife whut he brung wid him prob'ly have me ramblin' all day. Neveh seed a lady cry so much. Sho' wisht Ah could

git ol' Cap'n Jack to Memphis. Seems like he had 'nuff army to las' him f'm now on."

In the course of the next five minutes the general put the Wildcat through a cross-examination and then for a little while the officer stood silent looking up at the colors which flew from the flagstaff near where they were standing. He turned to the Wildcat. "Boy, come with me," he finally said.

The Wildcat followed the General into the post-adjutant's office. The moment the General entered the adjutant's room half a dozen officers jumped to their feet and stood stiffly at attention. The General spoke a few words softly to a colonel standing at a big desk. The colonel in turn spoke loudly to three or four of his aides. A stenographer near the colonel's desk began clicking a lot of words into a typewriter. Presently five or six sheets of paper were laid before the General. He picked up a pen and signed his name three times. He folded two of these sheets of paper and put them into an envelope.

"Take these down to Captain Jack right away," he said to the Wildcat.

The Wildcat snapped a salute at the General.

"Gin'ral, yessuh," he said. He walked to the door, where, civilian clothes and all, he perpetrated another bunch of military courtesy. He executed a perfect about face and walked from the room. "Gin'ral's message to Cap'n Jack sho' is important."

III

At the hotel he sought Captain Jack in that officer's room. The Captain was walking strenuously up and down the length of his room. In the adjoining room the Captain's lady was giggling cheerfully through a bunch of moist, hysterical tears. Every fourth giggle was punctuated with a sob three sizes too large for the little heart from which it came.

Captain Jack turned savagely to the Wildcat. "Where the hell have you been?" he said.

"Cap'n, suh," the Wildcat said, "mah feet hurt. Ah went out to git me some shoes." He reached into his pocket. "Ol' Gin'ral what I cooked dinner fo' on de train gimme dis papeh. Said to give it to you." He held the envelope which the heavy-set general had given him toward Captain Jack.

Captain Jack glanced at the enclosed documents. He read them again. His hands were trembling. "Great God!" he exclaimed. He walked rapidly into the adjoining room. "Honey," he yelled, "look here!"

Five minutes later he came out to where the Wildcat stood waiting. "Son, pack this stuff up. We start for Memphis to-night."

"Memphis! Us ain't gwine whah dey bury you?"

"To hell with Siberia! One of those papers you brought orders me to Memphis and the other is an order for my discharge from the army."

The Wildcat dived downstairs to where Lily was tethered in the baggage room. "Goat, doggone you, come to 'tenshun! Us is Memphis boun'! Hot dam! I knowed if we kep' trav'lin' we'd ketch Lady Luck!"

"Ah done ketched ol' Lady Luck!
Lady Luck ketched me!
Me an' Cap'n's Memphis bound——
Memphis, Ten-o-see."

THE END

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